

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



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Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre

Annual Report 2011-12



Barton Hills ©Keith Balmer

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 just over 1 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.

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 achieve accreditation;
- 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, was renewed this year and will run until September 2013.

A BRMC Development Plan was prepared and agreed by the Steering Group and minor adjustments were made to the BRMC Policies which are available from the BRMC web site (www.bedsbionet.org.uk).

Staff and Volunteers

The BRMC has 3 staff members, Jackie Ulliyett (Centre Manager), Keith Balmer (Network Officer) and Rachel Broomfield (Data Officer). From 1st April 2012 Rachel will be taking up a post with the Wildlife Trust, so we wish her well in her new job and would like to thank her for all her hard work over the last 4 years with the BRMC.

The BRMC has also had much help and support from several office volunteers this year. David Kay has helped with many different tasks during the year from uploading photos to Bedscape, our online photo library of wildlife sites across Bedfordshire, to producing searchable electronic copies of the Bedfordshire Naturalist (BNHS yearly reports) from 1946 to 1998 which Keith has now made available via the BNHS website. Laura Bambini helped with digitizing species records from reports during November and December 2011 before taking up a job with the RSPB in January 2012. Jennifer O'Leary started volunteering with us in January 2012 and has been helping with digitizing species records and hedgerow survey information. We are very grateful to our volunteers for their dedication and support and all the work they do.

We are also very grateful to all the volunteers who gather species information over the year and send their sightings to our County Recorders at the BNHS. The County Recorders do an amazing 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 Records Centre, so we would like to express our thanks to everyone involved.

Finance

This year has been quite a challenging one financially and these challenges look to continue into the future. The BRMC has a hosting arrangement with the Wildlife Trust BCN for which the BRMC provides 'in-kind' services. Natural England have reduced their financial support this year, however an agreement for two years is now in place. We were very pleased to sign a year's data supply agreement with the Environment Agency after much negotiation at the regional level. At the moment the EA agreement will be reviewed on a yearly basis, however it is hoped that in the near future longer term joint NE/EA agreements will be possible. We were also very pleased to sign a funding agreement with Bedford Borough Council for the next 3 years, a joint agreement with the Wildlife Trust. Other income was from project work and data requests.

The total income for 2011-12 was just over £52,600 with expenditure of around £63,300. The expenditure figure doesn't include office costs as these are covered by the Wildlife Trust BCN for 'in-kind' services valued at just over £6,000 per annum. The majority of the expenditure was staff salaries, with a small proportion spent on IT software subscriptions and staff training. The BRMC are fortunate to have a 'contingency fund' which has been carried over from previous, more prosperous, years to help pay for any shortfall in income, redundancy payments etc. The 'contingency' figure carried forward into 2012-13 was just over £49,500. The table below shows the detailed budget for this year, the previous year (2010-11) and a forecast for 2012-13.

| Funder | Income | | |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| | Amount in 2010-11 | Amount in 2011-12 | Anticipated amount in 2012-13 |
| Bedford Borough Council | £2,000 | £3,625 | £3,625 |
| Central Bedfordshire Council | £5,000 | £5,000 | £3,000 |
| Luton Borough Council | £1,000 | | |
| Environment Agency | | £10,000 | £10,000 |
| Natural England | £15,000 | £10,000 | £10,000 |
| Data Searches | £6,550 | £9,450 | £7,000 |
| Project work for Wildlife Trust BCN, Luton Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and others | £12,370 | £14,601 | £11,400 |
| Total income | £41,920 | £52,676 | £45,025 |

| Expenditure | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Type | Amount in 2010-11 | Amount in 2011-12 | Anticipated amount in 2012-13 |
| Staff salaries | £60,333 | £62,900 | £45,890 |
| Staff training | £60 | £200 | £600 |
| IT software subscriptions | £1,305 | £210 | £241 |
| IT hardware | £825 | | £1,000 |
| Subscriptions (e.g. NFBR) | £11 | £20 | £220 |
| Office furniture | £72 | | £100 |
| Contractor costs | | | £250 |
| Total expenditure | £62,606 | £63,330 | £48,301 |

| Balance (red denotes shortfall in income) | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Amount in 2010-11 | Amount in 2011-12 | Anticipated amount in 2012-13 |
| -£20,686 | -£10,654 | -£3,276 |

| Contingency/carry over brought forward at the start of the year | | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2010-11 | 2011-12 | 2012-13 | Anticipated amount in 2013-14 |
| £80,872 | £60,186 | £49,532 | £46,256 |

Achievements in 2011-12

Additional work to core data management and data requests (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.

- Two new CWS were recognised this year and one CWS boundary was updated due to development within the original site boundary.
- Several more of the remaining 'draft' CWS citations have been reviewed and finalized leaving less than 70 to be reviewed.
- The CWS criteria for woodland have been updated this year and new criteria for reptiles and amphibians were adopted.
- Three existing Local Geological Sites (LGS) have been deleted and two new sites have been recognized this year. The BRMC have provided the maps for these with text written by Martin Whiteley of the Bedfordshire Geology Group.
- Some updates made to the Roadside Nature Reserve citations using survey information from old files.

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 which 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 50,500 species records were added to the BRMC database during 2011.
- In January 2012 the millionth record was added to the BRMC database, the record was for 15 *Hoplodrina alsines* "Uncertain" moths, recorded on 21st June 2011 in Biggleswade by Lionel Burgess.
- In June 2011, the BRMC provided 11 updated datasets to the NBN Gateway, three more than last year. 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.



Hoplodrina alsines "Uncertain" moth

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.

- During 2011-12 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
- A new GIS dataset for Ancient and Veteran trees was produced based on data supplied by the Woodland Trust and has been made available via the Partner Pages.
- Work to update the Heathland and Acid Grassland habitat GIS layers with information provided by Phil Irving at the Greensand Trust is in progress and the resulting layers will be added to the Partner Pages.

Information Requests

- A total of 148 data searches were completed by the BRMC during 2011-12, a slight increase on last year.
- Of these, 99 were commercial enquiries and 49 were completed free of charge.
- The breakdown of free of charge enquiries is as follows:
 - Local organisations/partners = 16
 - Wildlife Trust BCN = 12
 - Students = 10
 - Local Authorities = 8
 - Private Individuals = 3
- The average turn-around time for providing data was just over 1 day, with 5 requests taking 6 days or more to complete. All data requests were completed within 10 working days of receipt of confirmation to supply data.
- The BRMC's charges were updated in January 2011 from £60 per hour to £90 for the first hour as it was felt that improvements to the service (better citations, improved species reporting etc.) justified an increase. The increase does not seem to have affected the number of requests received.

Advocacy

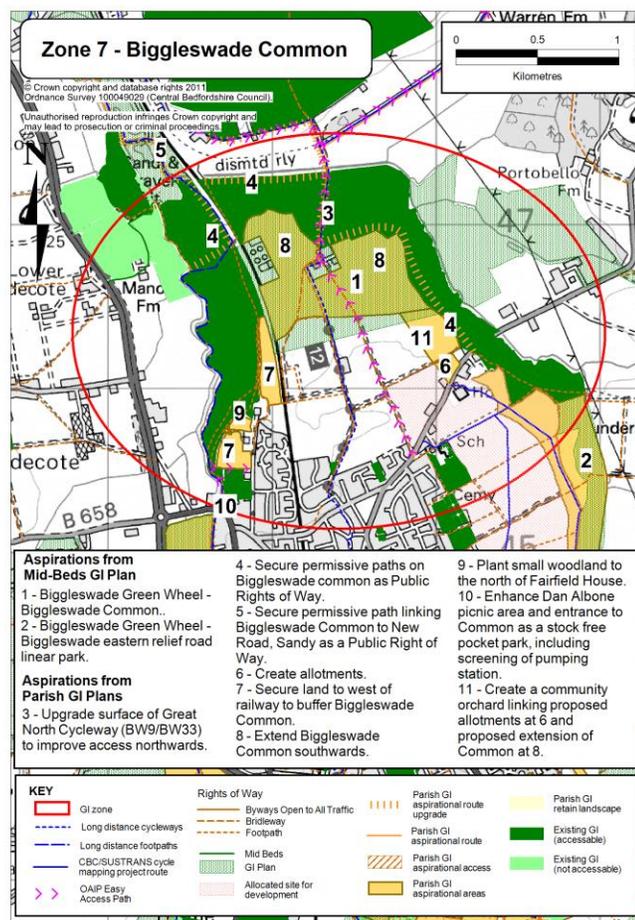
The BRMC, in collaboration with the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Environmental Records Centre (CPERC) organized a very successful 'Planning and Biodiversity Conference' held on the 14th April 2011 at the Møller Centre in Cambridge. The event provided an overview of the latest developments and emerging best practice related to spatial planning, development control and biodiversity and featured a series of presentations and case studies. We were most grateful to our speakers (Tony Juniper, Robert McCracken QC, Brian Eversham and Gary Grant) for their time and excellent talks.

Other Project Work

The BRMC has been involved in several projects over the last year which include:

- Luton hedgerow digitising – The BRMC digitized a paper based survey carried out in 1995. For each hedgerow the linework was digitised and the original survey sheets were scanned and are now available as electronic documents. Using a GIS, the electronic survey sheets can now be hyperlinked to the hedge linework so all the information is readily available. This has enabled the data to be used for analysis with other digital datasets held at Luton Borough Council.
- Luton Phase 1 habitat map – The BRMC digitized a paper Phase 1 habitat survey of Luton carried out in 1995. The new GIS layers include polygons of habitat areas and points showing the target notes. The paper target note information has been scanned as electronic documents and using GIS can be hyperlinked to the points on the digital map. Last year the BRMC carried out a similar exercise, digitizing the Luton part of the county 1987-88 Phase 1 habitat survey map. As both maps are now in digital format changes over time and other analysis can be carried out in detail and in combination with other datasets.
- Green Infrastructure (GI) mapping for the Ivel Valley – The BRMC has been involved in Parish, District and County scale GI mapping since 2008, working with many different partners. This project, run by the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, was designed to collate information from the existing studies for the Ivel Valley area to draw out a series of short, medium and long term priorities at a strategic level and at a smaller zoned level. The BRMC assisted with collating the data and producing new GIS layers and maps.

One of the GI 'zones' mapped for the Ivel Valley, part of a project run by one of our partners, the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity

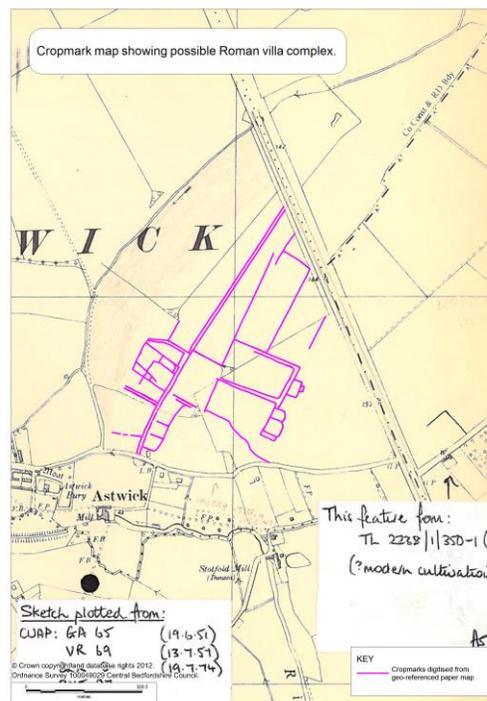


- Local Nature Partnership – The BRMC were asked as part of the Bedfordshire Green Infrastructure Consortium (GIC) Local Nature Partnership (LNP) capacity building work to conduct a survey regarding environmental data and how they are used within the county. The BRMC invited approximately 80 people involved in the LNP project (which includes members of the Bedfordshire and Luton Green Infrastructure Consortium, the Bedfordshire Biodiversity Forum, the Bedfordshire Environmental Education Working Group, and the Central Bedfordshire and Luton Local Access Forum) to take part in an online survey to find out about their use and need for environmental information. The BRMC was identified as the most widely used data provider and were regarded as an important resource for species and site information receiving very positive comments about the data search and ‘Partner Page’ services we provide. It was noted, however that around 50% of those responding to the survey were unaware of the services the BRMC provide, so improvements in advertising the information and services the BRMC deliver could be made. The full report can be downloaded from the BRMC website.
- Cropmark Mapping – The BRMC have just started working on a project with the Central Bedfordshire Council Historic Environment Record (HER) team to digitise some of the paper records of Cropmarks within the Central Bedfordshire local authority area. Once digitised the information will provide an overview of the data available, enable the cropmark information to be used with other datasets in the HER GIS system and allow easier supply of information to enquirers.
- NI197 –the BRMC assisted the Wildlife Trust in producing statistics for the number of local sites where positive conservation management has or is being implemented.
- Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre (HBRC) – The BRMC provided support and training for HBRC staff.
- Wildlife Trust BCN reserves mapping – The BRMC is currently digitizing the boundaries of nature reserves in Bedfordshire owned and managed by the Wildlife Trust BCN using information from deeds and management agreements to ensure they have the most up to date information.

One of the paper maps from which Cropmarks were mapped with pink lines showing digitised linework.

The map shows a possible Roman villa complex linked to the main Roman Baldock to Sandy road (now the A1) by a track or road indicated by the pair of very straight and closely spaced parallel lines which represent roadside ditches.

Prepared for Central Bedfordshire Council HER, one of our Partners.



Regional/National Collaboration

The BRMC works with other Record Centres within the East of England and staff attended two regional Record Centre meetings. 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.

Staff attended the NBN conference in November 2011 where the impact of technologies on biological recording was discussed.

Staff also attended the second ALERC conference in September 2011 where talks were presented on progress with ALERC and current legislation affecting LRCs and data flow. Smaller workshops were attended in the afternoon discussing widening the funding net and managing local sites data.

The Future of BRMC

As mentioned above, we were sad to say goodbye to Rachel at the end of the financial year, which was part of a culmination of special 'Working Group' and Steering Group meetings to ensure the financial sustainability of the BRMC into the future. The BRMC is now running with 1.8 FTE staff. Two Working Group meetings were held towards the end of 2011 at which discussions and suggestions were put forward to develop new project ideas for which funding could be sought. As a result of this, several new projects were identified and taken forward to see if funding could be obtained. This was a difficult process especially due to the BRMC hosting arrangement with the Wildlife Trust BCN, however one project was successful in obtaining funding from Central Bedfordshire Council to digitize paper Cropmark maps for the Historic Environment Record. The other project ideas have not yet been successful, however it is hoped that one or two of these may still be taken forward.

The BRMC Steering Group discussions are ongoing to ensure sustainability of the BRMC.

The BRMC is very grateful for the additional time that Steering Group members gave to assist with the Working Group and appreciate the difficult decisions that have had to be made this year.

Current Data Agreements

| Type of Agreement | Organisation |
|--|---|
| Hosting Agreement (due for renewal Sept 2015) | Wildlife Trust BCN |
| Memorandum of Agreement (negotiated yearly) | Natural England |
| Data provision agreement (negotiated yearly) | Environment Agency |
| Data provision agreement (three year joint with Wildlife Trust BCN until 2014) | Bedford Borough Council |
| Data provision agreement (negotiated yearly) | Central Bedfordshire Council |
| Data sharing agreement (due for renewal) | 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 |