

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



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## Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre

### Annual Report 2012-13



Houghton Regis Quarry © 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 nearing 1.09 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](http://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 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, runs until September 2013.

## Staff and Volunteers

The BRMC currently has two permanent staff members, Jackie Ulliyett (Centre Manager) and Keith Balmer (Network Officer). Since November 2012 Jackie has been seconded two days a week to manage the Northamptonshire Biodiversity Records Centre (NBRC). This arrangement is due to finish in October 2013, and to make up for the two days of Jackie's time, James Skinner (Data Officer from NBRC) has been helping with the workload.

The BRMC has also had much help and support from several office volunteers this year. In April 2012 we were sad to say goodbye to David Kay who has assisted with many different tasks over the last eight years and has been a fantastic help to us. We would like to thank him for all his help and we wish him well for the future. Jennifer O'Leary has now been volunteering with us for over a year and has been helping with digitizing species records as well as doing some work for the Wildlife Trust checking planning application lists. We are very grateful for her dedication and support and all the work she has done over the last year. Sim Dhinsa volunteered with us for 5 months from April working on digitizing species records, scanning and georeferencing paper maps for digitizing and loading site photos onto Bedscape. We are very grateful for his help and wish him well in his new job.

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 a less challenging one financially than anticipated, however it's possible this could change in the future as little of our funding is secure year on year. The BRMC has a hosting arrangement with the Wildlife Trust BCN for which the BRMC provides 'in-kind' services. Natural England continued their financial support this year, the second of a two year agreement. We were very pleased to sign another year's data supply agreement with the Environment Agency. It is still hoped that in the near future longer term joint NE/EA agreements will be possible. Our funding agreement with Bedford Borough Council is now in its second year, a joint agreement with the Wildlife Trust. Other income was from project work and data requests.

The total income for 2012-13 was just over £48,000 with expenditure of around £44,800. 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, reduced this year from previous years as we no longer have a full time Data Officer post and Jackie has been working 2 days a week for NBRC since 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012. The figure includes costs for James Skinner who has been working as a Data Officer for BRMC 2 days a week since 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012 to cover some of the work while Jackie is at NBRC. 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 2013-14 was just over £52,800. The table below shows the detailed budget for this year, the previous year (2011-12) and a forecast for 2013-14. The forecast for 2013-14 anticipates that we will have a new 'Business Development Manager' 1.6 days a week to assist the BRMC in securing additional funding, therefore salary costs and travel/training are estimated to be higher than in previous years.

| Funder  | Income            |                   |                               |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|
|   | Amount in 2011-12 | Amount in 2012-13 | Anticipated amount in 2013-14 |
| Bedford Borough Council   | £3,625            | £3,625            | £3,625                        |
| Central Bedfordshire Council  | £5,000            | £5,000            | £5,000                        |
| Luton Borough Council   |                   |                   |                               |
| Environment Agency  | £10,000           | £10,000           | £10,000                       |
| Natural England   | £10,000           | £10,000           | £10,000                       |
| Data Searches   | £9,450            | £9,660            | £8,000                        |
| Project work for Wildlife Trust BCN, Luton Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and others | £14,601           | £9,830            | £13,000                       |
| Additional income generated by new Business Development Manager                                     |                   |                   | £9,500                        |
| <b>Total income</b>   | <b>£52,676</b>    | <b>£48,115</b>    | <b>£59,125</b>                |

| <b>Expenditure</b>                           |                          |                          |                                      |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Type</b>                                  | <b>Amount in 2011-12</b> | <b>Amount in 2012-13</b> | <b>Anticipated amount in 2013-14</b> |
| Staff salaries                               | £62,900                  | £43,929                  | £43,281                              |
| Business Development Manager salary          |                          |                          | £11,424                              |
| Staff training/travel                        | £200                     | £307                     | £600                                 |
| Business Development Manager training/travel |                          |                          | £500                                 |
| IT software subscriptions                    | £210                     | £21                      | £265                                 |
| IT hardware                                  |                          |                          | £1,500                               |
| Subscriptions (e.g. NFBR)                    | £20                      | £220                     | £225                                 |
| Staff recruitment                            |                          | £73                      |                                      |
| Contractor costs                             |                          | £250                     |                                      |
| ALERC Accreditation                          |                          |                          | £300                                 |
| <b>Total expenditure</b>                     | <b>£63,330</b>           | <b>£44,800</b>           | <b>£58,095</b>                       |

| <b>Balance (red denotes shortfall in income)</b> |                          |                                      |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Amount in 2011-12</b>                         | <b>Amount in 2012-13</b> | <b>Anticipated amount in 2013-14</b> |
| <b>-£10,654</b>                                  | £3,315                   | £1,030                               |

| <b>Contingency/carry over brought forward at the start of the year</b> |                |                |                                      |
|--|----------------|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>2011-12</b>   | <b>2012-13</b> | <b>2013-14</b> | <b>Anticipated amount in 2014-15</b> |
| £60,186  | £49,532        | £52,847        | £53,877                              |

## Achievements in 2012-13

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 and similarly for the new District Wildlife Site (DWS) panel. This is a new category of site one tier below CWS in status and currently only being recognized in Luton.

- Five new CWS were recognised this year, eight CWS boundaries were updated due to development or changes within the original site boundary and one site was deselected.
- Several more of the remaining 'draft' CWS citations have been reviewed and finalized leaving 34 to be reviewed.
- Several changes have been made to the CWS criteria this year:
  1. Non-vascular plant criteria have been revised
  2. Vascular plant criteria have been revised to add criterion for rare plants in Bedfordshire
  3. Macro and Micro Moth criteria revised and tables updated
  4. New selection guidelines for Lakes
  5. Acid grassland indicator species list updated to include Harebell
  6. Removal of 'Bedslife' web links as the website is no longer in operation.
- The BRMC website has been updated with a new section describing DWS and the terms of reference and selection guidelines made available for download.
- The first three DWS were recognized this year.
- No changes to Local Geological Sites (LGS) have occurred this year. The Bedfordshire Geology Group now has a new Sites Manager for the LGS network and a new County Recorder. The BRMC have been in contact with both to ensure we keep up to date with any site changes.
- 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 52,113 species records were added to the BRMC database during 2012.
- In June 2012, the BRMC provided 11 updated datasets and one new dataset to the NBN Gateway. 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.

## *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 2012-13 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
- Work to update the Wood-pasture and Parkland habitat GIS layer has been completed to map the sites using Ordnance Survey MasterMap and the resulting layer added to the Partner Pages.
- A GIS dataset for Ancient and Veteran trees based on data supplied by the Woodland Trust is also available via the Partner Pages.

## *Information Requests*

- A total of 146 data searches were completed by the BRMC during 2012-13, a slight decrease on last year.
- Of these, 104 were commercial enquiries and 42 were completed free of charge.
- The breakdown of free of charge enquiries is as follows:
  - Local organisations/partners = 8
  - Wildlife Trust BCN = 9
  - Other Wildlife Trusts = 3
  - Students = 7
  - Local Authorities = 4
  - Private Individuals = 6
  - Cross border searches (no charge) = 5
- The average turn-around time for providing data was less than 1 day, with 1 request taking 6 days to complete. All data requests were completed within 10 working days of receipt of confirmation to supply data.

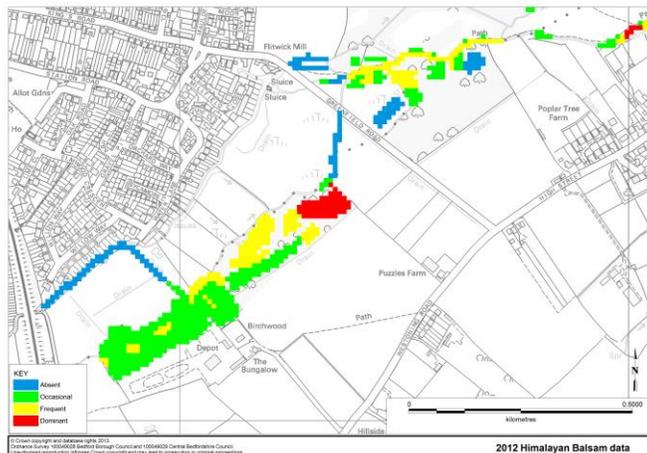
## *Advocacy*

The BRMC took the lead in collating all the information necessary to produce a new advocacy document for the East of England LRCs to promote our services to biodiversity data users. The final document is now available to download from our web site. Funding for the production of the interactive PDF was provided by an NBN/Defra contract, with the format based on one produced for the North West LRCs. The document provides an overview of each LRC in the East of England (including Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire) and gives an outline of services provided, the value of LRCs and the legislation and policy relevant to the services we provide.

## Other Project Work

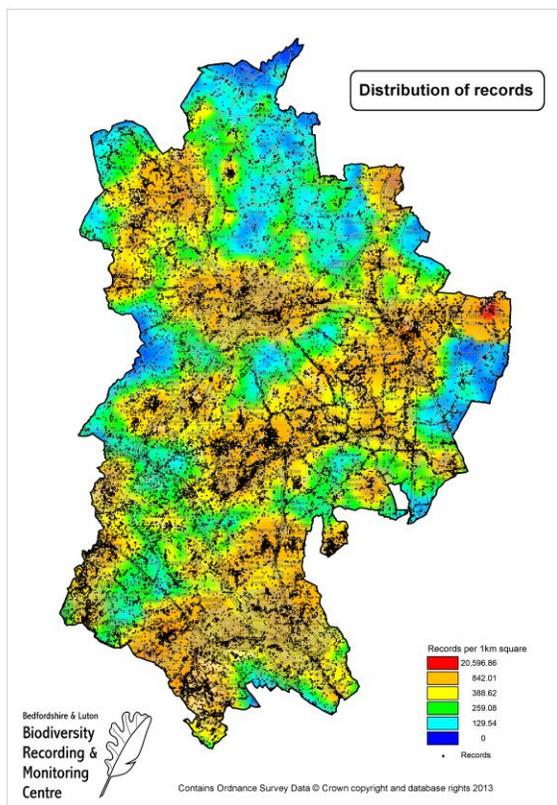
The BRMC has been involved in several projects over the last year which include:

- Luton Local Plan & Green Space Strategy – The BRMC has been working with the Greensand Trust to produce maps and information to inform the new Luton Local Plan & Green Space Strategy. This project has several different elements which include Green Space and Socio-economic maps (showing proximity of population according to the index of multiple deprivation 2010 to Green Space), landscape character assessment and mapping of a new tier of wildlife sites for Luton called District Wildlife Sites. The work has started this year but will be completed during 2013.
- Luton Nature Conservation Strategy - The BRMC has been working with the Wildlife Trust BCN to produce maps and information for an update of the Luton Nature Conservation Strategy. The purpose of the Nature Conservation Strategy is to identify the overall aims, objectives and priorities for the conservation of biodiversity in the Borough and bring them together within a single document updating the previous strategy completed in 1992. This will reflect the Council's duties under various Acts of Parliament acting as a reference document for anyone working within Luton, including those considering the management of green spaces across the Borough and in the formation of the Local Plan and other strategic planning documents.
- Himalayan Balsam mapping along the River Flit – The BRMC secured £1000 of funding from the 'Defra Fund for Biodiversity Recording in the Voluntary Sector: Project 4' to digitise three years worth of Himalayan Balsam distribution data around the Flitwick Moor and Flit Valley area. The project required 'in-kind' staff time to complete the project and we were very grateful for the time that Katharine Banham and Penelope Chaney of the Wildlife Trust BCN provided in helping to interpret their paper maps so that we could capture the information. The data was captured at 10m resolution and a total of 7,873 records have been supplied to the National Biodiversity Network. We have also set up a MapInfo workspace that enables the production of standard base maps for fieldwork in future years, along with a set of instructions for staff and volunteers on how to record Himalayan Balsam on the base maps so it can more easily be digitized in the future.



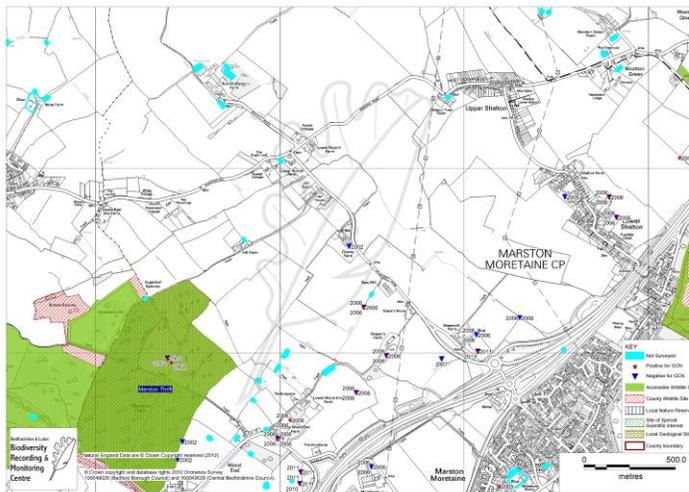
*Some of the digitised Himalayan Balsam data in the Flit Valley.*

- Cropmark Mapping – The BRMC completed ‘part one’ of 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. Now this information is digitised it provides an overview of the data available, enables the cropmark information to be used with other datasets in the HER GIS system and allows easier supply of information to enquirers. Next year ‘part two’ of the project will be completed to digitize the remaining paper records.
- A million (and a bit) records mapped – The BRMC has done some work to look at the distribution and number of records held within its database. The map was created using a grid of 1km squares that covered the county and then counting the number of records whose grid references overlaid each square. (2km and 10km records were excluded from the process as being too imprecisely located for this task). The 1km totals were then fed into an algorithm that looked at surrounding counts and smoothed them into a sort of contour map that was then luridly coloured. This was then overlaid with little black dots showing all the records, each plotted at the centre of its grid square, then underlain with an Ordnance Survey map and finally trimmed around the edges to “Greater Bedfordshire” (i.e. the larger of the admin boundary and vice-county 30 boundary). Popular sites stand out clearly as masses of black dots overlying yellow “high” areas, the dark blue areas show the least recorded areas, mostly corresponding with intensive agriculture.



***Density map of records held by the BRMC.***

- Landscape sensitivity mapping – The BRMC were asked to produce some maps for a Central Bedfordshire Council report on the sensitivity of the local landscape to wind power generation. The maps provided showed areas of constraint such as urban areas and assets such as wildlife sites, historic sites, tranquility and visual sensitivity. From combinations of these datasets a landscape sensitivity map was outlined and digitized for further consideration by the Council.
- Great Crested Newts in the Marston Vale – The BRMC are involved in a 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, led by Natura International, is taking forward the review of the GCN habitat network completed by Heather Webb for the Beds & Luton Biodiversity Partnership in April 2011. The aims of the project are to survey for GCN over the next two years, restore/create at least 20 GCN sites, provide training for Marston Vale Trust volunteers and produce a GCN strategy for the Marston Vale Forest area. So far the BRMC has produced maps of ‘target areas’ for surveys this year which also show where existing GCN records are. As the surveys are completed the records will be passed on to our County Recorder for verification and then added to our database.



**Example of a map produced for GCN survey during spring 2013.**

- 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 BRCC to use at Parish meetings in Caddington/Slip End and Dallow ward in Luton. BRCC collected ideas 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 which will be used by parish and local councils.
- SI 160 (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.
- Bedfordshire Wildlife Trust Reserves mapping – The Wildlife Trust have 25 reserves that they manage across Bedfordshire and as part of their ongoing management required digital maps showing accurate boundaries of the land that they own and lease. The BRMC were tasked with piecing together boundary information from deeds and leases and creating a new definitive GIS layer showing these boundaries.

## 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 2012 where the topic of 'Biological recording – fit for purpose?' was discussed.

Staff also attended the third ALERC conference in November 2012 where talks were presented by Defra and Natural England about the value of LRC data and an overview of the UK Ladybird Survey. Smaller workshops were attended in the afternoon discussing data enquiries (a comparison/contrast of services provided by LRCs) and how LRCs can benefit from smartphone technology.

## The Future of BRMC

As mentioned above the BRMC is currently running with 1.8 FTE staff. Unfortunately from 1<sup>st</sup> July James Skinner, who is currently working 2 days per week for the BRMC to make up for Jackie Ulllyett's time at the Northamptonshire Biodiversity Records Centre (NBRC), will no longer be working for the BRMC. This is so that he can cover maternity leave at NBRC. This means that the BRMC will be running with 1.4 FTE staff for a period of 4 months from 1<sup>st</sup> July to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2013. We will assess the situation regularly to ensure that the workload is still manageable.

To assist the BRMC and the two other LRCs hosted by the Wildlife Trust BCN ensure financial stability into the future, employing a Business Development Manager has been considered. At present this post has not been filled but the costs have been included in the budgets for next financial year (2013-14).

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 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 (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 |