

Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre

Annual Report 2022-23



Bedfordshire & Luton
Biodiversity
Recording &
Monitoring
Centre



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

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 Visitor Centre, Barkers Lane, Bedford, MK41 9DJ since 2003.

The BRMC gathers verified species records (currently over 3.2 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
- Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire (Wildlife Trust BCN)

The BRMC 'Memorandum of Understanding', which establishes collaborative relationships with all Steering Group organizations, except the Environment Agency, runs until September 2025.

Staff and Volunteers

The BRMC currently has four permanent staff members, Richard Coppins (Record Centre Manager, 2 days per week from September 2022), Jackie Ulyett (Data Manager, full time), Jennie Mitchell (Biodiversity Network Officer, 3 days per week) and Hazel Harbird (Data Officer, 2 days per week). Staffing levels rose from 2 FTE (full time equivalent) staff at the start of 2022 to 2.4 FTE staff from September 2022.

We would 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 collecting, collating and verifying 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

This year the BRMC has completed a large amount of project work, and an increase of 17% in the number of data requests received. 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 BRMC has a hosting arrangement with the Wildlife Trust BCN for which the BRMC provides 'in-kind' services.

The total income for 2022-23 was just under £96,000 with expenditure of just under £83,000, giving a surplus of just under £12,000. The majority of the expenditure was staff salaries. The table below shows the budget for this year, the previous year (2021-22) and a forecast for 2023-24.

The income in 2022-23 was higher than anticipated, as such we have been cautious in our estimates for the 2023-24 forecast. 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.

The income forecast for 2023-24 reflects current investments in the Record Centre, including the replacement of equipment. The increased expenditure from payments to the Bat Group for incorporating their data into searches, shown in other payments, has been a positive investment leading to increases in the income to the record centre in 2022-23. However, it should be noted that these figures are only an estimate.

	Income		
Funder	Amount in 2021-22	Amount in 2022-23	Anticipated amount in 2023-24
Data Searches	£30,706	£46,670	£42,000
Project work for Wildlife Trust BCN, Luton Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Greensand Trust, Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity and others	£15,450	£14,841	£11,550
Service Level Agreements with Local Authorities, Defra bodies and Utility companies	£31,693	£32,789	£35,100
Donations		£1,500	
Total income	£77,849	£95,800	£88,650
	Expenditure		
Type	Amount in 2021-22	Amount in 2022-23	Budgeted amount in 2023-24
Staff salaries/training/travel/recruitment	£60,366	£72,697	£86,160
IT hardware/software	£798	£1,798	£2,165
Subscriptions (e.g. NFBR, ALERC) & office consumables	£533	£538	£560
Other costs	£41	£7,852	£7,379
Total expenditure	£61,738	£82,884	£96,264
	Balance (red denotes shortfall in income)		
	Amount in 2021-22	Amount in 2022-23	Anticipated 2023-24
	£16,111	£12,916	£7,614

Achievements in 2022-23

A summary of our work this year is 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.

- Five County Wildlife Site (CWS) boundaries were updated from site surveys this year.
- One new CWS was designated this year.
- There remain 28 'draft' CWS citations to be reviewed and finalized.
- One District Wildlife Site (DWS) was upgraded this year and became part of a larger CWS.
- No changes were made to the Local Geological Sites (LGS) this year.
- One new Roadside Nature Reserve (RNR) was designated this year.
- Four RNR boundaries were updated this year.
- No changes were made to the Accessible Wildlife Sites (AWS) this year.

Summary of Bedfordshire non-statutory sites at 31st March 2023:

Number of Sites	Site Type
408	County Wildlife Sites
17	District Wildlife Sites (Luton Borough only)
15	Local Geological Sites
35	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, no updates have been made this year.

- During 2022-23 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 last updated in February 2019.

Species

As well as providing species data as part of the data search service, the BRMC provided access to species data for those organisations with whom we have an agreement.

- 265,166 species records were added to the BRMC database during 2022.
- The BRMC currently has 7 datasets available via the NBN Atlas.

Information Requests

- A total of 368 data searches were completed by the BRMC during 2022-23, a 17% increase on the last two years (314 during 2021-22 and 310 during 2020-21).
- Of these, 284 were commercial enquiries (241 commercial enquiries last year) and 84 were completed free of charge (73 last year).
- The breakdown of free of charge enquiries is as follows:

Requestor	Number of searches
Local organisations/partners	7
Wildlife Trust BCN	4
Local Authorities Service Level Agreements	3
Other Service Level Agreements	4
Private Individuals and students	3
Cross border searches (no charge)	59
National Schemes/Local Projects	4

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

General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

The BRMC has always taken the security of personal data very seriously, and from the 25th May 2018 new regulations came into force that gives everyone more control over how they are contacted and what personal data is held by organizations. As a result of this the BRMC has been continuing work to ensure that we comply with the regulations by: reviewing our data holdings and data security, asking our contacts to confirm whether they still wish to hear from us and updating our Policies.

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 Wildlife Trust BCN Trustees and Local Groups, the Bedfordshire Wildlife Working Group, Local Authorities and Parish Clerks within Bedford Borough.

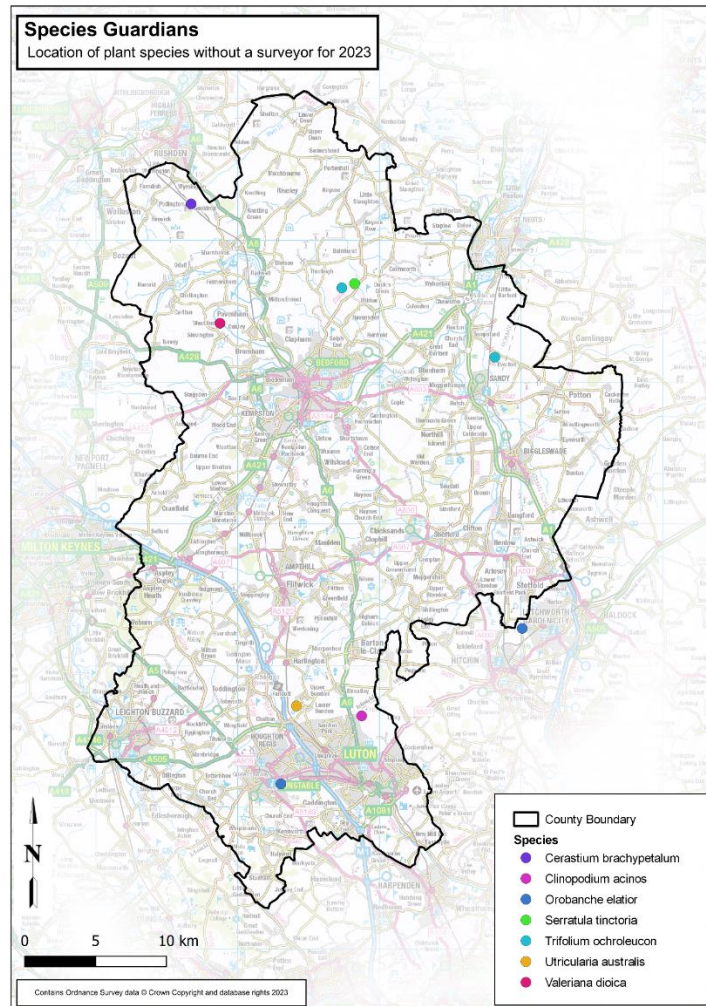
Other Project Work

The BRMC has been involved in several projects this year, although the number of such projects varies on an annual basis. Project work undertaken this year includes:

- 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 includes: Aspley Heath, Barton-le-Clay, Cardington, Clophill, Renhold, Sandy, Staploe, Stondon and Leighton Linlade. BRMC also produced Local Green Space maps for Houghton Regis Parish.
- Parish Neighbourhood Plans – Several Parish Councils have approached the BRMC over the last few years to provide maps for their Parish Plans, these are not the detailed maps produced for the Green Infrastructure mapping, but contained various information including local sites and development areas. In previous years we have delivered multiple Parish Neighbourhood plans, in 2022-23 it was only Riseley Parish Council that have requested maps for a Parish Neighbourhood plan.
- Local Nature Recovery Strategy – or LNRS are a Defra initiative in response to the Revised Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act (NERC) duty and aim to support the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain, support nature recovery, help planning authorities to incorporate nature recovery objectives and help deliver national environmental targets. Each strategy (usually at the County level) will:
 - Agree priorities for nature recovery
 - Map the most valuable existing areas for nature
 - Map proposals for creating or improving nature and wider environmental benefitsNatural England are implementing the LNRS and in Bedfordshire the ‘Designated Authority’ leading on this is Central Bedfordshire Council, who asked the Local Nature Partnership to do some initial preparation work. As a result of this, BRMC have been working with the Greensand Trust on some preliminary tasks:
 - Compiling a list of existing datasets (habitats, local sites (CWS etc.), existing Biodiversity Networks etc. and any other datasets that could be fed into the LNRS).
 - Include a summary explaining what each dataset is (when it was collected, format etc.).
 - Assess the quality of the datasets (geographical coverage, age of the datasets etc.).
 - Identify gaps (what do we need to bring up to date, information we are missing).
 - Assess each dataset in terms of licencing and the risks/barriers to not using them.
 - Include other datasets held by organisations other than the BRMC (for example Natural Capital Planning, Beelines from BugLife, wider Defra datasets).

BRMC have also been in contact with other Record Centres who were involved in the Pilots for the LNRS (Buckinghamshire and Cumbria) looking at the processes and datasets they used. Over the coming months BRMC will be involved in workshops to discuss the development of the LNRS and putting together maps and information to inform the process.

- **Rare Species Guardians** – The BRMC are assisting with a collaborative project to help protect the endangered flora of Bedfordshire, working with the Wildlife Trust, BNHS, Greensand Trust and many volunteer recorders to monitor certain vulnerable species across the county. The species being monitored are found in low numbers and/or at only a few sites in the county, are vulnerable to neglect, poor management or chance events and some have declined rapidly in number in the recent past. The aim of the project is to identify rare flora species and their locations, recruit willing volunteers to visit the sites and record the population/threats/changes. The information will then be assessed to look at where issues may be arising or where there are positive outcomes. Having an evidence based approach will enable a better understanding of the state of rare species in the county and how best to support population recovery, stabilisation and growth. The map below shows a few species still requiring Guardians as of April 2023.



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. BRMC staff attended BNHS Scientific and County Recorder meetings this year, 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 wherever possible. This year this has included:

- Providing Local Site information for the BNHS Journal
- Assisting our Flora County Recorder with updates to the Bedfordshire Red Plant List
- Providing advice/data searches/information/maps as required.

BRMC Server

The server that was installed in August 2013 continues to run well, although we are aware this will need to be replaced in the next year or so. This year, BRMC staff have been working from home with the option of working from the Priory Park office. Staff have the means to run data searches from our local PCs rather than across the internet this works well in the hybrid setting. The server remains at Cambourne which has a fast internet connection, and means it is easier for our colleagues in the IT department to assist with issues should they arise. With a VPN connection this has enabled us to work on files as though we were in the office, although for running programs such as MapInfo and QGIS some staff are still running these with the data stored locally and copying data back to the server. It very much depends on staff local internet connection as to whether this works sufficiently or not. The Cloud backup has continued to effectively work this year.

Regional/National Collaboration

The BRMC works with other Record Centres within the East of England and staff attended two online 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. It is also a useful forum for discussing and sharing methodologies for data supply, such as regional or national SLAs where standardized data formats are required.

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 two re-accreditations this year.

Staff attended the online ALERC conference in October 2022 where the theme was 'Taking care of business' with talks focusing on LERC business development. There were also additional workshops during the day including discussions of developments with R and iRecord.

The Future of BRMC

Retaining the quality of our service is very important to all the staff at the BRMC, so we will continue to look for ways to deal with the increased in the demand for data alongside the amount of data being received. The changes to the amount of staff time at the Record Centre this year has been a welcome addition allowing the BRMC to continue operating efficiently and effectively.

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

The BRMC has the following agreements in place, which is not an exhaustive list:

Type of Agreement	Organisation
Hosting Agreement (current until Sept 2025)	Wildlife Trust BCN
Data provision agreement (to 31 st March 2023)	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 provision agreements	Utility companies
Data sharing agreement (current until April 2027)	Bedfordshire Natural History Society
Data sharing agreement	Woodland Trust
Data sharing agreement	Peoples Trust for Endangered Species
Data sharing agreement	Bedfordshire Reptile and Amphibian Group
Ordnance Survey PSMA spatial data license	Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and Luton Borough Council