

INFORMATION AND DATA

Data underpins the entire biodiversity programme. A large amount of data is already available on the Hampshire Biological Record, but this could be improved. The development of a Hampshire Biological Record Centre is a priority concern.

The collection of data on habitats and species is fundamental to the development and implementation of a local biodiversity action plan. No single organisation has a statutory duty to collect biological information, yet the need to record and monitor this is vital.

A large amount of data on the biodiversity of Hampshire is already available and much of this is held on the Hampshire Biological Record, housed at Hampshire County Council. However, there is still much information to be obtained. There is also a need to co-ordinate the various sets of data held by different organisations, to ensure that the information is used most effectively to support the biodiversity programme.

The UK Biodiversity Steering Group Report stresses the fundamental importance of good data and a co-ordinated approach to both national data provision and local data management. The Report recommends a twofold approach:

- development of a national biodiversity database and information system
- development of a network of local record centres funded by local consortiums, to service data needs at the local level and support and exchange information with the national system



58. Biological survey

LOCAL RECORD CENTRES: A CHALLENGE SET BY THE UK STEERING GROUP

The UK Biodiversity Steering Group Report suggests that local data management is best carried out by local biological record centres. Local centres are needed to both serve local needs and contribute information at the national level. The Report recommends that each centre should be developed and managed by a consortium of local organisations, and have the following functions:

- to act as a focus for biological record management in the area
- to manage the collection, validation and maintenance of key data sets on behalf of partners
- to act as a contact point for access to data by local and national users
- to provide support and guidance to recorders, local societies and recording schemes
- to provide support for the local planning process
- to promote and steer future survey
- to provide data and an information service to a range of organisations and individuals

The consortium-led approach has many benefits: managing partners will have a sense of ownership of the centre; costs of the data service are shared between a number of organisations; there is less duplication of records; and it is easier to standardise and quality control the collection, validation and management of the data.

A group of national organisations is developing a 'National Biodiversity Network', a project which includes both establishing the national data system and network of local centres. Centres are likely to operate at the county scale and will be developed where there is a local partnership committed to their development.

The Hampshire Biological Record

Hampshire County Council has, for many years, acted as a central repository for much habitat and species data, and has a computer database and staff dedicated to the collection, maintenance and supply of biological data.

There are almost 5,000 detailed site records and 300,000 species records on the Biological Record database. This covers about 34,000 ha or 9% of Hampshire and currently excludes the 8% of the county contained within the New Forest. Best estimates are that detailed habitat records of another 3 to 8% of Hampshire are required to cover most sites likely to prove of particular nature conservation significance. Although large amounts of data on habitats is standardised and accessible on the Biological Record, much of the information on species other than plants is not. The collection of additional information on both habitat and species is a high priority for refining the audit for the Biodiversity Action Plan.

Although the Biological Record is incomplete, lack of data should not delay the Action Plan process. The best available data will be used, and at the same time, improving the information base will be given high priority. Upgrading the collection, organisation and co-ordination of all biological information will enable the establishment of a solid baseline for all Hampshire's habitats and species of conservation concern. Regular and systematic recording will also be needed to detect change and measure progress in achieving biodiversity targets.

Data collection through ground survey is largely undertaken by the Hampshire Habitat Survey Project. Approximately 250 sites, or an area of about 3,500 ha, are covered each year. The two person survey team is based with the Hampshire Wildlife Trust and is funded by the County Council, English Nature, the Environment Agency and several district councils.

Habitat Map for Hampshire

Hampshire County Council recently commissioned a new set of aerial photographs of the county. From this, a map which shows the distribution of habitats and land-use has been produced in digital form for display on computer. The mapping is very comprehensive. Every land parcel has been assigned one of 81 habitat/land-use classes, and all hedgerows longer than 100m are also mapped. This mapping will be invaluable for identifying the distribution and extent of habitats.

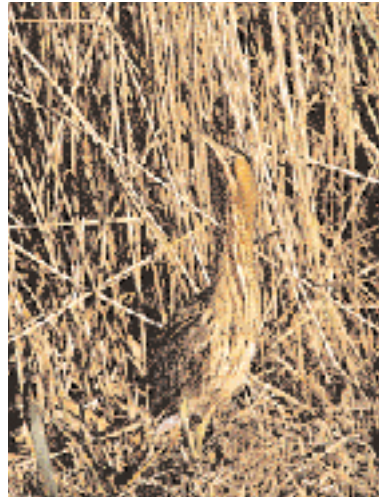
The full nature conservation quality of some land cannot be determined by interpretation of aerial photographs. For example it is difficult to differentiate between grassland that is herb-rich and that which has been agriculturally improved. In these cases, the mapping will assist the focusing of ground survey which, in turn, will be used to refine the mapping. This comprehensive mapping provides for the first time the opportunity to accurately monitor land-use and habitat change.

Towards a Record Centre

The existing Hampshire Biological Record, the Hampshire Biodiversity Partnership, and the Habitat Survey Project, together with potential assistance from the National Biodiversity Network project, provide the ingredients for the development of a county record centre. This would become part of the National Biodiversity Network. A record centre would capitalise on the data and information systems already available and ensure the full complement of services required to support the Partnership and the biodiversity programme.

INFORMATION AND DATA: ACTION

- continue to undertake detailed habitat survey of Hampshire in support of biodiversity conservation, using the Hampshire Habitat Survey Project
- encourage, support and co-ordinate a voluntary network of recorders to assist in providing data on biodiversity
- encourage the centralisation of data on habitats and species into the Hampshire Biological Record and use this database for monitoring progress in biodiversity action
- progress the development of a Hampshire Biological Record Centre to service the information needs of the Hampshire Biodiversity Partnership and individual partners and contribute to the National Biodiversity Network
- establish a programme to monitor land-use and habitat change using the digitised habitat and land-use mapping of the county as a baseline



59. Bittern

Habitats and Land Use in Hampshire

