

BULLETIN TO INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE – 18 JUNE 2020

2019/20 ANNUAL REPORT ON NORTH EAST SCOTLAND BIOLOGICAL RECORDS CENTRE (NESBReC)

1 Purpose of the Bulletin

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of the activity of the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 through the presentation of the NESBReC Annual Report, as shown in Appendix 1.

2 Background

- 2.1 NESBReC maintains a quality assured database of biodiversity information and disseminates this information to allow ecological assessment for Aberdeenshire Council and other organisations on relevant planning applications, forestry proposals, planning policy and Strategic Environmental Assessments. NESBReC also acts as a hub for biological data exchange and provides support and guidance for biological recorders among the general public. The NESBReC Strategy 2017-2020 sets out the core objectives and key priorities for NESBReC.
- 2.2 NESBReC has 2.6 full-time equivalent staff and forms part of the Specialist Services Team, within the Planning & Environment Service. The Service is based at Woodhill House and has the prime role of collating, managing and providing biological information for the North East of Scotland.
- 2.3 NESBReC allows the Council to satisfy the relevant requirements of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy 2004 and associated 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity and National Planning Framework 3.
- 2.4 NESBReC is supported through an annual grant from Scottish Natural Heritage and Scottish Forestry, as well as having an annual agreement with the Cairngorms National Park Authority and a Service Level Agreement with Aberdeen City Council. Other funding is provided through project work and payment for biological data searches for private organisations.
- 2.5 The annual report has been brought to this Committee as it is the policy reporting Committee for the Service in order to inform members of the activity NESBReC has undertaken in relation to the above strategies and frameworks.

3 Discussion

Summary of Annual Report for 2019/20

- 3.1 The performance indicators show that NESBReC undertook 2,678 biological data searches and added 43,673 species records to the database during 2019-2020. NESBReC also delivered 7 biological training days with 122

attendees and hosted an Annual Recorders Forum which attracted an attendance of 115 local recorders from all across the North East of Scotland. In addition, presentations were delivered to various local groups and organisations focussing on public awareness of biological recording.

4 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

4.1 The Bulletin helps deliver Council Priority 1 – Support a strong, sustainable, diverse and successful economy.

The Bulletin helps deliver Council Priority 11 – Protect our special environment, including tackling climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

4.2 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply in relation to this Bulletin.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial		x	
Staffing		x	
Equalities		x	
Fairer Scotland Duty		x	
Town Centre First		x	
Sustainability		x	
Children and Young People's Rights and Wellbeing		x	

4.3 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required because this Bulletin is only to inform the Committee on the performance of NESBReC and does not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.

4.4 There are no specific staffing or financial implications arising from this Bulletin, but trends are used to inform future budget planning.

4.5 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level ([Corporate Risk Register](#)):

- *Budget Pressures:* NESBReC is supported through several annual grants and has a Service Level Agreement with Aberdeen City Council. If any of these grants were not successful or the Service Level Agreement was terminated, there would be a financial impact through a reduction in income.
- *Working with other organisations:* As above, if existing grants and agreement were to cease the result would be a reduction in income. NESBReC has a good working relationship with all of its funders and allows for a quality assured database of biodiversity information to be kept for the whole of North East Scotland. This allows for better informed decision making on biological and ecological matters relating to planning applications.

4.6 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level ([Directorate Risk Registers](#)):

- *Climate Change*: Conserve the natural and historic environment by protecting and enhancing landscape, biodiversity and historic assets. It is recognised that there is a heightened risk of the natural environment being damaged or lost as a result of climate change. NESBReC will continue to provide biological information which can be used when determining planning applications to help ensure the natural environment is protected and enhanced through new development.

5 Scheme of Governance

5.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this Bulletin and had no comments to make and are satisfied that the Bulletin complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

5.2 The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of Section F.7.1 of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as the Bulletin allows scrutiny and review of the activity of the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC).

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Bulletin prepared by Glenn Roberts, NESBReC Co-ordinator
Date: 24 April 2020

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – North East Scotland Biological Records Centre Annual Report 2019/20

NORTH EAST SCOTLAND BIOLOGICAL RECORDS CENTRE (NESBReC) ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

PROJECT AIMS AND CASE STUDIES

1 Data Searches

NESBReC Team Objective – Protection 1: Supply data to decision makers, educational establishments, private business and the public

NESBReC in 2019/20 undertook the following number of data searches:

<i>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2019/20</i>	<i>2018/19</i>	<i>2017/18</i>
No. of Planning Applications searched	2,499	2,624	3,019
Average response time to a Planning Application	2 days	2 days	2 days
No. of Aberdeenshire bridges searched	2	2	3
Other Aberdeenshire searches and requests	33	40	26

N.B. Search results of planning applications are available to view on the Aberdeenshire Council website and can be found by searching the appropriate planning application number.

<i>Non-Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2019/20</i>	<i>2018/19</i>	<i>2017/18</i>
No. of searches and requests for data	114	93	118
Average response time to a search	4 days	4 days	4 days

<i>Commercial requests Performance Indicator</i>	<i>2019/20</i>	<i>2018/19</i>	<i>2017/18</i>
No. of searches and requests for data	65	37	41
Average response time to a search	3 days	3 days	3 days

Aberdeenshire planning application searches were down slightly from 2018/19, in line with less planning applications being lodged. However, this was still 96% of applications submitted searched, an increase of 1% from 2018/19. Non-Aberdeenshire searches increased mainly due to an increase in requests for data from students, local groups and other conservation organisations. Furthermore, requests from the commercial sector were considerably higher this year with environmental consultants asking for data searches, many of them repeat customers.

Case Study 1 – Example of a Search Request from Aberdeen City Council

Activity: Request for data from Aberdeen City Council (ACC) for any data on notable species, habitats and wildlife sites at eight Local Development Plan Opportunity Sites.

Output: A GIS search of the area was carried out for any relevant data held on the NESBReC database.

Outcome: This request was made within the terms of the Service Level Agreement between NESBReC and ACC. The data requestor received a wide range of data

from one source within a short time frame instead of having to source data from multiple organisations. This provided a good baseline of information which permits better informed reports to be produced, which ultimately allows for higher quality decisions to be made with the information and ensures better protection of biodiversity within the area. NESBReC receives annual income from ACC in return for delivering this service.

2 Data Management and Sharing

NESBReC Team Objective – Protection 4: Work in partnership with relevant individuals, groups and organisations at national, regional and local level to share knowledge and best practice.

NESBReC continued to add species records to the database in 2019/20.

Data Management Performance Indicator	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18
No. of records held in database	1,573,272	1,529,599	1,471,278
No. of records added to database	43,673	58,321	110,524

NESBReC continued to liaise with National Recording Schemes and the National Biodiversity Network in order to facilitate the sharing of data. In particular, further work was carried out in order to continue contributing data to the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland. The total records added to the NESBReC database in this annual period was less than the previous year due to the Data Assistant post being vacant for around ten weeks and then around six weeks' training of the new post holder was required to ensure quality of data entry.

Case Study 2 – Sharing of Plant Species Data with the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (BSBI)

Activity: Liaising with BSBI to share plant data collected by NESBReC surveyors during 2015-19.

Output: A dataset of 66,009 plant records from 2015-19 was shared with BSBI for them to add to their national database.

Outcome: NESBReC was able to provide a significant dataset of recent plant data from North East Scotland to BSBI for their future use. Notably, it will be a good addition to the BSBI's Atlas 2020 project. Furthermore, BSBI will share the dataset with the Natural Biodiversity Network Atlas for a global audience of potential users. This helps promote our local biodiversity to a large public audience. In return, NESBReC will receive data pertaining to North East Scotland from BSBI. Such partnership working and reciprocal sharing of data benefits both parties in terms of increased knowledge of species diversity for future land management decisions. Thus, ensuring a better quality of place to live, work and visit.

3 Training Days

NESBReC Team Objective – Promotion 1: Promote, encourage and co-ordinate biological recording among the wider community;

NESBReC Team Objective – Promotion 2: Provide training days as appropriate;

NESBReC Team Objective – Promotion 6: Provide support and guidance for recorders

A programme of seven biological identification training days at different locations around Aberdeenshire was delivered. An eighth event was organised in March 2020 but had to be cancelled due to Covid-19. Subjects covered included: Mosses & Liverworts; Leafminers; Coastal Plants; Hoverflies; Fungi; Swifts; and Coastal Birds. These were available for all to book a place and were free to attend.

Training Days Performance Indicator	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18
No. of training days held	7	8	8
No. of attendees on training days	122	139	114

Case Study 3 – Identifying Fungi Event in September 2019

Activity: An event held at Fyvie Castle to help people to identify different species of fungi. A renowned Scottish expert was hired to lead the course and to show attendees the characteristic features of different species and to explain the complex life history of fungi.

Output: There were 22 attendees at this event who came from all over North East Scotland to learn from a renowned expert. A list of 82 species was compiled for the site from varying habitats. This was 1 of 7 events held around the NESBReC area on varying topics. They were free to attend and 44% of the costs were covered as a key output from the Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) grant for 2019-20.

Outcome: This event helped to showcase species of fungi in woodland and grassland habitats in Aberdeenshire as well as gathering important data for the local area and the NESBReC database. This will help ensure better quality land management decisions relating to biodiversity can be made in this location, while it was also an opportunity to promote the area to those who have not visited it before.

4 Local Recording Community/Recorders Forum

NESBReC Team Objective – Promotion 1: Promote, encourage and co-ordinate biological recording among the wider community;

NESBReC Team Objective – Promotion 6: Provide support and guidance for recorders

Recorders Forum Performance Indicator	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18
No. of attendees at Recorders Forum	115	96	110

Case Study 4 – Recorders Forum 2020 Event

Activity: The annual NESBReC Recorders Forum was held on 7 March 2020 at the Zoology Lecture Theatre, University of Aberdeen. The event was free to attend and 44% of the costs were covered as a key output from the Scottish Natural Heritage grant for 2019-20.

Output: A programme of 8 presentations were delivered involving local groups and subjects of local biodiversity interest including: NESBReC update; Scottish Ornithologists Club; Butterflies & Moths in North East Scotland; Fungi in the Scottish Mountains; Flora of North East Scotland; NESBATS bat group; Ury Riverside Park; Grazing Impacts on Bumblebees & Butterflies. Sufficient break out time was provided on the day to maximise networking between attending recorders and NESBReC staff

During this break out there was an opportunity for attendees to participate in a 30 minute “Meet the Experts” session where they could make contact with various local wildlife experts and recording groups and ask questions to them about how to gain further experience. Outcome: The event attracted 115 recorders from across North East Scotland. NESBReC was able to focus on delivering key messages to attendees and to enter into face to face dialogue with recorders and answer any queries. Feedback questionnaires on the event (and biological recording issues) were collated after the event via Survey Monkey with very positive responses. This annual event is a useful way of keeping in touch with recorders, to thank them for submitting records over the past year and to motivate them to keep recording over the year ahead. This will help ensure data continues to be collected to allow better quality decisions relating to biodiversity to be undertaken

Contact and dialogue with local recorders was also enabled throughout the year via the NESBReC website, email communications and Facebook page (887 “likes” so far and 985 “followers”).

5 Local Groups and Organisations

NESBReC Team Objective – Promotion 1: Promote, encourage and co-ordinate biological recording among the wider community;

NESBReC Team Objective – Promotion 3: Support the work and projects of the North East Scotland Biodiversity Action Partnership;

NESBReC Team Objective – Promotion 5: Participate in relevant promotional events that highlight the biodiversity of North East Scotland;

NESBReC Team Objective – Promotion 6: Provide support and guidance for recorders;

NESBReC Team Objective – Promotion 7: Work in partnership with relevant individuals, groups and organisations

NESBReC engaged with a number of local groups and organisations.

<i>Engagement with other groups Performance Indicator</i>	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18
No. of presentations and events	14	14	13

Presentations and interaction with various local groups and organisations included: North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership, NESBiP Awareness & Information Group, Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC) students, Grampian 50+ Network, Duthie Park Environment Day, North East Invasive Non-Native Species Forum, St Fittick’s Church Group, Aberdeen University Careers Night and the Bennachie Centre Trust at the Bennachie Visitor Centre. This allows for the better collation of biological data, which in turn permits better informed decision making.

Participation has also continued in the Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum’s (SBIF) Review of the Biological Recording Infrastructure of Scotland. This has involved sitting on the SBIF Advisory Group as the representative for Scottish Local Records Centres (LRCs) in order to advise on and support the production of the Review document. Latterly, advice has concentrated on advocacy of the Review to Government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other bodies involved in the collation, management and use of biological data

6 Project Work

NESBReC Team Objective – Management 2: Act as a focus for biodiversity records for

the North East of Scotland;
NESBReC Team Objective – Management 3: Act as a node within the National Biodiversity Network

Case Study 5 – Habitat Survey in Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City

Activity: Project to map habitat compartments and record plant species in areas of Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City in order to inform various biodiversity strategies and procedures.

Output: Habitat maps of various areas were produced in GIS format and plant species records generated for the NESBReC database.

Outcome: Data collected from this survey project is used weekly by NESBReC in Aberdeenshire Council planning application searches. Aberdeen City Council also use the data in this way as a function of the three-year SLA with NESBReC. The data will also be used by both local authorities in the assessment process of any new Local Nature Conservation Sites to inform their upcoming Local Development Plans. Species data was shared with the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (BSBI) for them to add to their national database and to upload on the National Biodiversity Network Atlas. This helps ensure there are better quality documents used for decision making in terms of biodiversity. It also helps ensure better protection is provided to some of the most sensitive and rare biological sites within Aberdeenshire ensuring they are conserved for future generations.