



Introduction

A wildlife records centre for the County of Devon

Data about wildlife and its whereabouts and health is crucial to its conservation – a fact recognised by all those involved in countryside management and by individuals and organisations that make decisions that affect the natural environment. The collection of such data is a valued activity for many naturalists and natural history societies.

In Devon there are a number of agencies, authorities, voluntary organisations and individuals that hold information on the County's wildlife, in varying forms and for many purposes. However, these databases remain largely unconnected and are often very far from complete, with no one group or organisation able to provide an overview or to service the many bodies involved in recording wildlife in Devon. The records are kept in different formats, are disparate and can be difficult to interrogate and analyse.

Information on the health and whereabouts of wildlife in Devon is needed by a wide range of individuals and organisations to:

- 1 Enhance the value of Devon's biodiversity
- 2 Minimise adverse impact on the development of the countryside
- 3 Advance individual knowledge and enjoyment.

Without accurate and up to date information decisions that will affect Devon's wildlife future are taken at high risk.

The Devon Biodiversity Records Centre (DBRC) was established to gather, manage and disseminate data about Devon's wildlife. DBRC takes a partnership approach based upon shared objectives, and offers mutual benefits to those involved. It aims to establish the kind of network of knowledge and intelligence which Devon needs if it is to safeguard and promote the interests of its rich natural terrestrial and marine environment over the next millennium.

DBRC cannot work in isolation and needs key partner organisations and individuals to succeed. It must engage with and work within national and regional initiatives that are taking place to monitor and enhance biodiversity. Crucial to this approach are the needs of partners and the security of data that goes with working together.



AIMS OF DBRC

- 1 To achieve and maintain comprehensive, up to date and rigorous information on the state of Devon's natural environment, particularly wildlife habitats and species.**
- 2 To promote and provide appropriate access to information held at DBRC for better understanding and enjoyment of Devon's wildlife as well as its protection and enhancement.**
- 3 To encourage and facilitate co-operation and communication between all those involved with recording wildlife.**

OPERATION

All work in DBRC is carried out under the following three principles:

- 1. The quality of work will always meet the clients' needs**
- 2. Work will always be delivered to agreed deadlines**
- 3. Clients will enjoy working with DBRC, and staff and volunteers will enjoy working for DBRC**

DATA COLLECTION

- Receive, organise and store data on Devon's marine and terrestrial environments in a manner that makes it easily understandable and retrievable
- Promote and conduct surveys to help monitor the state of specific marine and terrestrial habitats and species, and the trends affecting these
- Lead on monitoring of the extent and condition of Devon's County Wildlife Sites
- Seek the exchange of data between recording groups and DBRC

DATA MANAGEMENT

- Ensure all data held by DBRC is accurately verified and validated
- Maintain metadata concerning all data held by DBRC and other organisations
- Ensure all appropriate security safeguards are in place and implemented

DATA DISSEMINATION

- Disseminate data on habitats and species in the most appropriate form that meets client needs.
- Produce reports and summaries of wildlife information in Devon.
- Identify gaps in data for Devon by species, habitat and geographical area and provide a plan to fill those gaps.



FUNDING

DBRC's work is funded from a mix of sources:

1. Service Level Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding with partners who require specific work to be carried out
2. Contracts with partners that relate to specific projects
3. Commercial contract work for other organisations and businesses
4. Data licences with partners
5. Revenue from data searches for commercial organisations

DBRC operates on a not for profit basis. The size and scale of its operation is dependent on the funding it can secure. It is hosted by the Devon Wildlife Trust which has legal and financial responsibility for the Centre.



DBRC Policies

1. DBRC Data collection policy

1.1 Data collection

1.1.1 Data gathered by DBRC will be used to build up a comprehensive picture of the wildlife resource in Devon, and help to monitor the health of our natural environment.

1.2 Strategic data collection

1.2.1 There is a huge amount of data that could be collected and collated by DBRC. In order to manage the process of data acquisition sensibly DBRC needs to have a clear and strategic view of:

- What its existing holdings are
- The data that is held by other organisations and individuals
- The data DBRC needs to collect to fill significant gaps and provide for present and future data needs of key data users i.e. its data priorities
- How to maintain the acquisition of new data

1.2.2 DBRC will keep under regular review data input priorities and the resources devoted to the above points.

1.3 Metadata, data audits and reviews

1.3.1 In order to fulfil the LRCs strategic data collection objectives DBRC will carry out:

1.3.2 Ongoing creation and management of metadata. Meta databases have been constructed listing all the datasets held at DBRC and many of the datasets held by other organisations and individuals (started November 2001 and still being worked on). These should form the basis of a written data acquisition policy that recognises the need for management of new data and therefore dovetails with a realistic data management plan (see Data management policy).

1.3.3 Regular reviews of existing data (using data audits) both within the Records Centre and other data gathering organisations and individuals. This analysis of existing data will enable targeting of specific datasets for acquisition or at least show the location of datasets for future reference. It will identify gaps in data that will guide field survey or prevent duplication of effort.

1.3.4 In order to do this DBRC will seek out, maintain and nurture relationships with other organisations and individuals (see 3).



1.4 Other recorders of Devon data

- 1.4.1 DBRC will make every effort to liaise and communicate with all relevant data gathering/ holding organisations with Devon data.
- 1.4.2 Efforts will be made to secure datasets through data exchanges, service level agreements etc.
- 1.4.3 Where this is not possible DBRC will at least try to establish what data are being held by the organisation or individual in question. Perhaps by offering a data audit service.
- 1.4.4 DBRC will endeavour to obtain all reports and papers containing Devon data from journals, Local Authorities, consultants, research establishments (governmental organisations, colleges, universities etc) etc.
- 1.4.5 DBRC will act as a depository for incidental sightings made by anybody. Every record that is received by DBRC will be validated and verified before entry onto a database.

1.5 Survey

- 1.5.1 Surveys should be pro-active, in order to fill identified gaps. The current priorities are for regular, ongoing County Wildlife Site survey.
- 1.5.2 DBRC will also carry out public participation surveys, which utilise the enthusiasm, knowledge and numbers of members of the public to gain valid data on behalf of DBRC and other organisations. Current public participation surveys include Operation Otter, SeaQuest, SeaSearch and Japanese Knotweed.
- 1.5.3 Any survey programme DBRC undertakes will be part of DBRC's strategic data acquisition plan, and will follow these objectives.
- 1.5.4 All surveys are to be consistent with DBRC's aim of collecting up to date and rigorous information on the state of Devon's wildlife habitats and species.
- 1.5.5 Survey methods to record vegetation and faunal communities will use a standard, nationally recognised, ecological technique.
- 1.5.6 All surveys will be carried out in line with Health and Safety regulations and DBRC procedures e.g. data collection methodologies, formats and contact with landowners.
- 1.5.7 All surveys to be carried out only with permission having been granted from the necessary authorities, whether it be landowners, coast guard etc.



2. DBRC DATA SECURITY POLICY

2.1 Data security

- 2.1.1 DBRC has a duty to ensure the security and long term safety of the records and data (e.g. OS map data) in our care. Security includes protection from unauthorised access or editing, theft, physical damage through fire, flood accident and neglect. Procedures must be in place to ensure the regular archiving of original material and the copying or backup of data. There must be a recovery plan in the event of loss of data.
- 2.1.2 DBRC complies with the Data Protection Act (1998), and follows Devon Wildlife Trust's data security procedures.
- 2.1.3 DBRC ensure DWT maintain an IT Disaster Recovery Plan

2.2 Access to the DBRC offices

- 2.2.1 The DBRC office is based at 27 Commercial Road, Exeter which is leased by Devon Wildlife Trust.
- 2.2.2 The building has a security alarm that is set every night.
- 2.2.3 Public access to the building during office hours is direct to DBRC, the door is locked when no staff are present; out of office hours access is not possible for staff or visitors without prior arrangement.

2.3 DBRC/DWT Staff and Volunteers

- 2.3.1 DWT staff and DWT volunteers have access to the DBRC office but do not have access to the databases. DBRC staff query the database on behalf of DWT staff, under the DWT Service Level Agreement, and provide copies of paper data where necessary.
- 2.3.2 DBRC uses volunteers for a variety of tasks, including data entry. DBRC follows DWT's procedures when recruiting volunteers. All volunteers working with children or vulnerable adults have to have a Criminal Records Check. Otherwise, prospective volunteers are interviewed, and, if necessary, references are taken. Volunteers sign a Volunteer Agreement, stating that they will not pass data on to third parties.
- 2.3.3 Volunteers are provided with appropriate training and supervision if they need to use the DBRC databases, and access is limited (see access to digital records).

2.4 Access to DBRC's digital records

- 2.4.1 DBRC will ensure that access to all digital data is strictly controlled:



- 2.4.2 DBRC databases will be kept on the DBRC server, which is password-protected and is only accessible to DBRC staff and authorised volunteers and contractors.
- 2.4.3 DBRC databases will be password-protected, and access will be controlled by DBRC staff
- 2.4.4 DBRC volunteers and contractors will have limited access to the databases, and will not be able to edit the data, or to see records that are marked as confidential. There is no public access to the DBRC databases.
- 2.4.5 Data exported to other applications (such as MapInfo) will be kept on the DBRC server
- 2.4.6 Data will be backed up daily and back-up tapes will be stored off the premises (providing a data recovery plan)
- 2.4.7 All incoming computer data will be virus-checked by an up-to-date anti-virus package

2.5 Access to DBRC's paper records and archives

- 2.5.1 The majority of field recording continues to use paper format either in notebooks or on recording cards. There is a vast archive of historical records which may never be computerised in full and also collections of record cards that remain as 'vouchers' for data entered into computer systems. These paper records are important reference material and their physical care and security remains essential.
- 2.5.2 Paper records should be kept out of direct sunlight, away from damp and mould
- 2.5.3 Original records are not to be taken out of the DBRC office, but copies may be made where appropriate
- 2.5.4 Archive copies should be made of all paper records, and stored out of the building
- 2.5.5 All datasets will be listed in a meta database

2.6 Sensitive species

- 2.6.1 DBRC will maintain a list of sensitive species. Information about these species is restricted, and will only be released under specific circumstances:
- 2.6.2 In accordance to restrictions in data agreements AND
- 2.6.3 Where there is a conservation gain or a legitimate use for the data AND
- 2.6.4 Where DBRC has confidence in the person asking and the reason why (with appropriate referees where necessary)
- 2.6.5 If there is any doubt, relevant recorders, experts or agencies will be consulted. Where necessary, an 'Information Request Form' may need to be completed by the person requesting the data. A log will be kept of these requests.
- 2.6.6 Records of sensitive species will be marked as confidential on the DBRC database. Access to these records is restricted, and they cannot be exported



- 2.6.7 Paper records of sensitive species will be kept in marked folders in a locked filing cabinet

2.7 Releasing Data to Third Parties

- 2.7.1 Data released to third parties will be subject to written data agreements or data licences (see the Data Dissemination Policy).

3. DBRC DATA MANAGEMENT POLICY

3.1 Data management

- 3.1.1 All data held by DBRC should be accurate, reliable and easily accessible. Data acquired by DBRC needs to be validated and verified, and incorporated into DBRC's data management systems. DBRC must document its data holdings, and manage the associated metadata so that it is readily available.

3.2 Data ownership

- 3.2.1 The majority of data held by DBRC is supplied by people or organisations other than the Records Centre. In law, ownership of data generally resides with the person who collected the data or their employer, if they were paid to collect it. Recorders placing copies of their records (or the originals) in the Records Centre do not relinquish ownership or copyright over these data – unless they specifically state that they wish to do so. Data owners can place restrictions on the use of data, and have the right to withdraw data at any time.
- 3.2.2 Information on data owners is kept on the DBRC database. DBRC complies with the Data Protection Act (1998), so personal details are never given out to third parties without written consent. In specific circumstances, recorder's names may be passed to conservation and recording organisations for the purposes of record verification.
- 3.2.3 DBRC must ensure that:
- 3.2.4 Ownership of data is clearly recorded and that conditions of use put onto data by owners are respected.
- 3.2.5 Written Data Agreements are set up with data owners, and restrictions of use are documented
- 3.2.6 Paper and computer data that have restrictions on use are clearly marked and access to these data is controlled (see the Data Security Policy)
- 3.2.7 All staff are aware of restrictions on data use and the law relating to ownership and copyright



3.3 Documenting data

- 3.3.1 DBRC must be clear about what data are held in the Records Centre, their quality and status, and whether they have been entered onto the database. All this information should be documented, and the metadata managed on an electronic database.
- 3.3.2 All datasets should be logged as they arrive at DBRC in the metadata database and metadata (data about the datasets) is recorded on a compatible and appropriate electronic database. Metadata should include details about the quality and completeness of the dataset, data ownership, restrictions of use, confidentiality and whether the data has been processed and entered onto the database.

3.4 Processing newly acquired data

- 3.4.1 As data is obtained by DBRC it needs to be validated and verified, entered onto the database, and the originals filed.
- 3.4.2 All records must be validated (checked that all necessary information is included) and verified (checked that the species recorded are correct) before they can be entered onto the database. The process of verification will depend on the species and the recorder; doubtful or unusual species will require supporting information if the recorder is not known to DBRC. Local experts and recording groups will be consulted if necessary.
- 3.4.3 Original records will not be erased or obscured and will not be altered unless for the sake of accuracy or veracity - and in this case will be clearly marked with the alteration, the name of person making the alteration and the date of alteration.
- 3.4.4 Data about species, sites and habitats is entered onto an appropriate data recording system that is compatible with other recording systems. The original records are clearly marked with the name of the person entering the data and the date before filling.

3.5 Processing existing data holdings

- 3.5.1 Existing data holdings are subject to the same processes as newly acquired data. DBRC has a large backlog of data that needs to be processed. Large datasets can often only be sensibly accessed when computerised. All datasets that are not yet on the database should be documented, and metadata should be entered on an electronic database. A data management plan should set out priorities for data entry.



3.6 Sensitive species and habitats

- 3.6.1 Data about sensitive species and habitats will be clearly marked, and all staff will be aware of the restrictions relating to these data (see the Data Security and Data Dissemination Policies).

4. DBRC DATA DISSEMINATION POLICY

4.1 Data dissemination

- 4.1.1 The core work of DBRC is to manage and supply biodiversity data. This includes supplying uninterpreted data as part of Data Exchanges and Service Level Agreements processing, analysing and interpreting data to provide information as part of a data enquiry service. DBRC also supplies data for local, regional and national initiatives and submits data to the NBN Gateway.

4.2 Data agreements and service level agreements

- 4.2.1 Data supplied as part of a Data Exchange or Service Level Agreement will be subject to a written data agreement or data licence. These documents will detail the type and format of the data supplied, restrictions on access and use, and frequency of updates.

4.3 Data enquiry service

- 4.3.1 Data held by DBRC is available to all legitimate enquirers unless the data requested is restricted, or the data request is unreasonable. DBRC reserves the right to ask an enquirer to complete a 'Data Request Form', and to take up references where applicable, before the release of data to that enquirer. Information about sensitive species will only be released under the terms of the Data Security Policy.
- 4.3.2 DBRC reserves the right to make a charge for the time it takes for staff to extract, analyse and supply data to the enquirer. This is not a charge for the data (see the Charging Policy).

4.4 Mapping data

- 4.4.1 The digital maps used by DBRC are supplied under the Mapping Agreement with Devon County Council. This agreement accords with the national Mapping Services Agreement for Local Authorities and Ordnance Survey copyright requirements.
- 4.4.2 The aerial photos routinely used by DBRC are supplied by Devon County Council and are subject to licence agreements.



4.5 Data ownership

- 4.5.1 The copyright of records supplied is retained by DBRC or the original recorders. The data supplied may not be published or supplied to third parties without the written permission of DBRC.
- 4.5.2 DBRC complies with the Data Protection Act (1998), so personal details are never given out to third parties without consent. In specific circumstances, recorders' names may be passed to conservation and recording organisations for the purposes of record verification (see the Data Management Policy).

4.6 Sensitive species

- 4.6.1 Information on sensitive species is restricted, and will only be released under the terms of the Data Security Policy.

4.7 Environmental Information Regulations (1992) and Freedom of Information Act (2000)

- 4.7.1 DBRC has regard to the Environmental Information Regulations and Freedom of Information Act, and recognises the constraints imposed by ownership of data and confidentiality issues.