

End of year report 2021 - 2022



Introduction

It's been a couple of years since we published an end of year report, and yes, it will come as no surprise that the pandemic is going to get some of the blame. However, in addition, there is also the sheer volume of activity that we have undertaken in that time that's stopped me sitting down and taking the time to capture it here. Recent years have seemed to blur from one to the other, without a moment to take stock and reflect on our achievements, and that of our partners and many stakeholders and supporters.

So, now having found the time to write this report, welcome to an unashamed pat on the back for everyone that has helped us achieve the things we have, since the world turned upside down, and words like 'furlough' facemask, and facetime became the norm.

Whilst I'm predominately covering the last 12 months, I have taken the liberty of injecting the odd reference to the previous year to. As in 2020/21 we went through some of the greatest changes in the workplace and wider environment in which we operate, than have ever happened in the centre's history, and as always, we were out there gathering data, and supporting others work as best we could.

It goes without saying that I am immensely proud of the people I work with at DBRC, for their diligence, professionalism, pragmatism, and patience, as we carved our way through into new territory, and new ways of working. Working remotely, on-line delivery of workshops and engagement opportunities, restrictions on surveys, and even down to shortages of IT equipment, as everyone rushed to buy laptops and webcams, so that we could all embrace a world of Zoom & MS Teams!

DBRC is only a small organisation, with limited resources, but during the last two years of chaos, we have been leading on some really significant and sizeable county scale projects, alongside delivering a wide range of smaller geographically targeted projects within Devon. When we think county scale and DBRC, the CWS framework normally sits front and centre. But, in addition, with support from our broad partnership, we developed the first ever review of the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) in the county, and spearheaded a national movement to see this important conservation tool made fit for the future challenges it may face.



End of year report 2021 - 2022

We also worked with our host DWT and partners, to drive forward the first iteration of a Nature Recovery Network for Devon. One of the few counties in England to have completed this task to date, and we can now look forward to the next 12 months, where we can refine, update, and further develop it.

21/22 also saw the first review of the County Wildlife Sites Designation Guidelines since 2009, another important piece of work driven forward by DBRC staff, alongside partners and stakeholders.

In a normal year, achieving one of those things would have been deemed a success, but to cram all three into close succession has only been possible through our continued development as a team, and the continued use of novel approaches to the use and dissemination of the data we collect.

On a less positive note, during the course of the year, we identified that a significant amount of our data was being published within the Natural England Priority Habitat Inventory, without consent from DBRC. This amounted to approximately 1600 polygons of habitat data, principally from around 1990 – 2004. We raised the issue with the NE data and evidence team as soon as we became aware, and they quickly accepted that they were at fault, and that the data should be removed.

Trust between data providers and data users is a really important element of any relationship in our sector, so this was a disappointing situation to have to deal with.

As always the report can't capture everything, and is only a summary of our activity, if you have specific questions about any of our work, do feel free to contact me, and I would be happy to expand.

Ian Egerton – DBRC Manager



End of year report 2021 - 2022

Headline figures from 2021 – 2022

- **DBRC databases now hold in excess of 6.8 million species records**
- **We completed over 500 data searches for consultants & the public**
- **70 Wildlife Sites (CWS & UWS) were resurveyed within the Biodiversity Monitoring Framework project**
- **19 new CWS were designated, with many more being expanded in size**
- **DBRC delivered or worked within nearly 40 partnership projects of varying scope and scale**

In Addition:

All of the individual species records sent in to DBRC are invaluable to informing conservation efforts locally and nationally, but there are always the ones that crop up each year that spark additional interest.

- *Gonocerus acuteangulatus* (the Box Bug) - reared from eggs found on Alder Buckthorn at Chudleigh Knighton Heath DWT, July 2020 (adults and nymphs subsequently found elsewhere in South Devon so probably now colonising and establishing more widely)
- *Andricus grossulariae* - a gall wasp which causes red currant-like galls on Turkey Oak - Churchills Local Nature Reserve, Newton Abbot, May 2020 & subsequently seen elsewhere in South Devon.
- *Oxytelus migrator* - a rove beetle new for Devon - found in Dartmoor pony dung July 2021, Lustleigh
- And Paul Tillsley found a horn stalkball fungus (*Onygena equina*) in Cowley Wood, north Devon. It was found growing on the horns on a sheep's skull, and once the record was confirmed by Devon Fungus Group its was officially a first for Devon, and possibly for the Southern half of England.



End of year report 2021 - 2022

Projects and initiatives – Summary:

Please see our website for more up to date information, and to keep informed as new projects come forward. However, here are a few of the projects we have been involved in over the last year.

Biodiversity Monitoring Framework – DBRC, DCC & DWT

The Biodiversity Monitoring Framework in Devon (BMF project) is one of the largest habitat monitoring projects in the UK. The main part of the project involves surveying a number of existing County Wildlife Sites (CWS) following a specific methodology each year. It has been running since 2009, and we now have a wealth of information on over 1200 sites on which to draw. That's approximately half of the existing CWS having been resurveyed since their designation, and importantly, that information helps to monitor the quality of individual CWS over time. The resulting data also indicates patterns of change in habitats across the county, as a whole, and can feed into the production of a 'State of Devon', be used to evidence the need for specific conservation initiatives, and influence local planning policy and other decision making forums.

The project provides free management advice to landowners, signposting them to funding support where possible, and our staff work closely with a number of partners and projects to ensure any links between these can be made efficiently. A recent example being the now completed Devon Greater Horseshoe project, where our CWS framework provided advisors with critical information on grassland sites, identified habitat networks which support that species, and where opportunities for enhancement could be delivered.

During this season we also targeted survey of a number of Unconfirmed Wildlife Sites (UWS), as the designation of more sites brings greater protection and recognition of these important areas of semi natural habitat. Whilst only 19 new sites were designated, the survey of many other new areas enabled some existing sites to be expanded. Typically this occurs where the site falls under the same ownership as a nearby CWS, or was an associated part of the landscape, with both sites having clear synergy/connectivity

This hadn't taken place for over a decade, and whilst we were unable to complete all of the areas identified as priorities, we have worked through those considered the most critical. Working with our funding partners, the CWS Panel, and a range of local experts who volunteered their time, we reviewed current sections, updating them where required, and also looked at creating some new criteria, such as haul out sites for common and grey seals.

The new guidelines can be accessed here - <https://www.dbrc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CWS-Guidelines-and-appendices-V1.4-March-2022.pdf>



End of year report 2021 - 2022

The BMF project remains at the heart of DBRCs field activity, and the resulting data gathered underpins many of our partners strategic project development, but also new initiative such as the Nature Recovery Network Mapping. Gathering information on these sites, and designating new sites is a crucial role DBRC plays in helping to drive forward nature's recovery in the county, however, numerous other organisations visit CWS during the course of their work and we are keen to harness their efforts more effectively, to help make the project even more influential.

If you are able to help DBRC by providing survey data on CWS please go to - <http://www.dbrc.org.uk/biodiversity-monitoring-framework/>

Ancient Woodland Inventory Review – broad partnership

Since trialling the review in a small area within Teignbridge in 2019, DBRC has since gone on to build a project partnership of over 20 organisations, and secured match funding from the national project. This has enabled us to drive forward a full county wide initiative, which due to the scale of the task will take a total of three years.

The mainstay of the work has taken place during the pandemic, and since our last end of year report. Fortunately, the initial phases were heavily focused on desk based elements, and negative impact of C19 was limited. However, during 21/22 we saw our first ground-truthing commence, using a mix of DBRC staff, trained volunteers, and specialist contractors. Towards the end of the year this also included a targeted wood pasture exercise, with surveys of ancient and veteran trees in key locations being undertaken by specialist contractors. The data gathered from the field surveys forms an integral part of the evidence base, which will support the new inventory, and this field based phase will continue through 22/23 and possibly into spring of 23/24.

The new methodology being used in this review brings the inventory up to date with the use of modern mapping and digitising techniques, and allows for a much smaller threshold of 0.25ha for sites. Considering the previous threshold of 2ha, we expect numerous new sites to be added to the final layer, but in addition, some existing sites may lose their classification, due to original errors back in the 1980's. As a mapping layer used to underpin many statutory planning processes, it's really important that the quality of the work is high, providing confidence to the eventual end users. This project is a prime example of where DBRC's skills, knowledge and robust approach to data standards can come to the fore, creating a public resource and conservation tool, that will be fit for purpose for many years to come.

However, as with many similar initiatives, which include mapping of important semi natural habitats within DBRCs habitat layers, the exercise cannot be fully comprehensive. Devon is a large and fragmented landscape, and many areas aren't well documented. Aerial images remain a useful tool, but can often vary in quality, with wooded areas being in shaded valleys, where resolution is compromised. Whilst the new inventory will be a significant leap forward, it may require continued additions, as new survey information is forthcoming in future years.

<https://www.dbrc.org.uk/projects-surveys/current-projects-and-surveys/awi-review-partners/>



End of year report 2021 - 2022

Nature Recovery Networks – broad partnership

Nature Recovery Networks will be used to define our areas of most significant existing wildlife habitat, and to identify the areas most suited to restoration, or creation. Making the 'Lawton' principles of Bigger, Better, and more Joined up, a central focus. During 2020/21 and through the last 12 months, DBRC has led on the technical development of the NRN mapping for Devon. Working within a broad partnership headed by DWT, we have developed iteration 1 of the mapping, which went live on the Devon County Council Environment Viewer in January. Having consulted with partners throughout the process, and having taken stock of the previous methodologies used by varying projects throughout the country in recent years, we produced two primary spatial layers. These were Core Nature Sites, and Other Nature Sites, forming a network of sites of high nature value. In addition, we produced a modelled data layer, which provided habitat suitability for the main habitats in Devon. This layer suggests where it may be most likely that restoration or creation of habitats might take place, based on parameters such as underlying soils. The mapping and supporting documentation/user guide, is now available via the following links.

<https://www.devon.gov.uk/environment/environmental-maps>

<https://www.devonlnp.org.uk/our-work/nature-recovery-network/>

Saving Devons Treescapes - broad partnership

After a successful development phase through 2019 - 2021, where DBRC led on the biodiversity monitoring for the project, there was then a gap whilst we waited to hear about funding of the main delivery phase. Having catalysed a number of citizen science initiatives in that initial phase, we were keen to keep them going during 2021. This included recruiting, training and supporting a range of volunteers surveying for brown hair streak butterflies, as well as undertaking bat & lichen surveys. Our thanks to the Halpin Trust, for their financial support which made this work possible, whilst we waited for the National Lottery to confirm future funding. Now that the project team is set up, DBRC will continue to provide training and support of volunteers alongside those staff, and lead on key elements where our expertise is required.

<https://www.devonwildlifetrust.org/what-we-do/our-projects/saving-devons-treescapes>

South Devon Water Vole Project - Devon Environment Fund & SD AONB

During the year a successful application for grant funding from Devon Environment Foundation and South Devon AONB enabled DBRC to investigate a possible return of water voles to a small area of South Devon. Water voles were once common in our waterways, but were declared extinct in Devon in 2002. In recent years some very limited reintroductions have been returning this iconic and highly threatened species to our landscape.



End of year report 2021 - 2022

-

This pilot project aimed to identify the potential distribution of water voles within a discreet area of South Devon, where a previously unknown release had taken place over a decade ago. Initially working with a small number of landholders on targeted surveys, our approach was shaped partly by C19, and the reduced delivering of face to face training events. However, a number of landowners and local volunteers were able to participate, and we were able to confirm the population is more widespread than originally thought. In the meantime, if you have a record of a water vole sighting, please send it in via our sightings page [Wildlife sightings – DBRC](#)

Conservation Communities Project - DWT

This project builds on many years of landscape-scale work in North Devon by DBRC & DWT, including the development of biodiversity audits by DBRC for numerous parishes within the NIA project. In October 2019 we secured funding through the National Lottery Heritage Fund, to work in 11 of those parishes, supporting local residents and community groups to get involved in a range of biodiversity led initiatives, which will greatly improve our collective understanding of the species and habitats there. Residents will be able to attend a range of training workshops, walks and talks, and alongside local experts, individuals and volunteer groups will be supported in a range of nature-based activities. These include setting up long term monitoring of indicator species, such as otters and dormice, sharing knowledge on nature-friendly verge management, pond creation and improving access to nature for local residents. You can find out more at the [project website](#).

Green Minds - Plymouth

Following on from several recent community based green space initiatives by the city council and our host DWT, this European funded project is working within a new, wider partnership. It aims to breathe new life into a number of community spaces, ranging from traditional parks to strategic green corridors, increasing peoples enjoyment, and understanding of the nature benefits good management with local input can bring. DBRC is providing expertise in monitoring sites, alongside citizen science elements developed with local residents. Training and mentoring will enable interested individuals and groups to be supported in learning about species and habitats, and how they can be protected and have increased resilience into the future. If you would like to learn more about the project, you can visit the project website [here](#).

Tamara Landscape Partnership

After a highly successful development phase, this project has now been granted its main funding grant, and over the next few years will deliver a range of cross cutting, historical & natural environment, and social/enterprise initiatives. These will help increase the areas resilience to climate change, and its ability to rise to the economic challenges many sectors locally, currently face.



End of year report 2021 - 2022

The project is funded through the New Heritage Lottery Fund and offers the partnership the opportunity to focus on elements such as farming and land management challenges, alongside flooding, access, enjoyment of the landscape, its increased resilience, and nature, alongside the historic environment. In addition, it will work with local businesses and traditional micro initiatives such as Tamar Grow Local, which seek to create jobs and investment in the Tamar Valley, by harnessing just one of the valleys long-established, but often undervalued strengths.

DBRC are central to many of the biodiversity sub-projects, providing ecological skills, biodiversity data gathering and management resources, and existing data and evidence. Our first task has been to undertake habitat audits of four of the Nodal Farms, that are partnering the project. This is through a mix of remote sensed aerial photo interpretation of the land holdings, liaising with the landowners to identify focus areas, and ground-truthing through field based survey. These baselines will then help each holding plan any interventions and monitor changes through the extent of the project, as re-surveys are planned in the final year.

<https://tamarlandscapepartnership.org.uk/>

Core activity

DBRC undertakes a very broad range of activities as part of its core remit. Other than gathering and managing data from multiple sources, these activities include supporting the counties recording groups, providing guidance and resources to help communities and individuals to better record, understand, value and protect biodiversity, supporting community and research projects, advising initiatives being developed by partners on their data management, monitoring and survey requirements, and providing information and advice to landowners, as part of the County Wildlife Sites framework.

Whilst it is the funded projects above, that typically dominate our field season, we are working hard to try and find resources to better support others that want to find out more about their local biodiversity. One of the ways we have been doing that is via the emerging Wildlife Warden Groups being set up around the county. Through this year we piloted working more closely with communities who have developed active wildlife groups. For example, Action for Climate in Teignbridge (ACT) has successfully grown a Wildlife Warden Scheme over the last two years, which now covers a large proportion of the district. The wardens get involved in a number of activities, from botanical and species survey to practical conservation, and monitoring planning applications.

Our community ecologist Jess Smallcombe has been working with the co-ordinators of the group, to support their work and ensure that important sites that are currently unrecorded in those parishes can be added to our databases, and even designated as new County Wildlife Sites where possible. The information local volunteers can gather will be invaluable to helping us increase our understanding of the wildlife rich habitats within our landscape, but also where areas are degrading, or are at risk.



End of year report 2021 - 2022

DBRC also inputs into numerous biodiversity focused partnerships on a regular basis, which include Exmoor National Parks Nature Conservation Advisory Panel (NCAP), the Devon Invasive Species Initiative (DISI), the Devon Local Nature Partnerships Wild About Devon initiative, and many others.

Technical developments/data management at DBRC

During the course of the year we continued to develop our systems and processes, using external AWS servers for much of the heavy lifting during the NRN work and other large scale mapping projects.

We acquired the newest Blue Sky aerial imagery for the county, and used available Lidar to model a linear feature layer (hedgerows). We are now spending some time ground-truthing before it can be used to inform our work.

In addition, we invested considerable time in reviewing and enhancing our existing habitat data layer, with a view to incorporating the significant amount of non priority habitat data and remote sensed data that we hold, into one place on our systems. This Combined Habitat Layer will provide a far greater coverage of the county, and allow us to update the Nature Recovery Network mapping at the end of 2022.

Current recruitment includes a new specialist GIS role, as although we are already a heavy GIS user, DBRC is doing far more modelling of our data, and developing products and services that require significantly more resources in that area.

And like many organisations, we are now working far more from home, so the technical solutions needed to make that happen effectively, require careful design and robust management.

Service Level Agreements and Data Agreements

Service Level Agreements (SLAs) are an important source of income for DBRC and a vital service for local authorities and others. SLA partners get access to DBRC's site and species data, and are able to use DBRC time for enquiries or other work. In 2021 – 2022 we maintained SLAs with:

- Dartmoor National Park Authority
- Devon County Council
- Devon Wildlife Trust
- East Devon District Council
- Environment Agency
- Exeter City Council
- Exmoor National Park Authority
- Mid Devon District Council
- North Devon District Council
- Plymouth City Council
- South Hams District Council
- Teignbridge District Council
- Torbay Council
- Torridge District Council
- South West Water
- West Devon Borough Council
- Clinton Devon Estates
- South West Water



End of year report 2021 - 2022

And we also led on the development of a regional data collaboration, supplying Network Rail Southern Area, with biodiversity information covering 10 counties in the South and South West.

In addition, we have also secured a Service Level Agreement in recent weeks with Forestry England, further increasing our partnerships breadth.

Data Agreements with conservation organisations and recording groups are integral to the quality and quantity of data at DBRC. DBRC swaps data with local and national recording groups and schemes, and is also able to offer support in kind to some of these groups. DBRC has formal data agreements with the following organisations, though we also swap data on an ad hoc basis with many other groups and individuals:

- Barn Owl Trust
- Botanical Society for the British Isles
- Butterfly Conservation
- Dartmoor National Park Authority
- Devon Birds
- Devon Fly Group
- Devon Fungus Group
- Devon Mammal Group
- Devon Moth Group
- Devon branch – British Dragonfly Society
- Devon Reptile and Amphibian Group
- Dartmoor National Park Authority
- Exmoor Natural History Society
- Natural History Museum
- Exmoor National Park Authority
- Seasearch
- SeaWatch Foundation

Working alongside these organisations and individuals, as well as members of the general public, and through targeted survey and monitoring within our varying projects, DBRC now has access to over **6.8** million species records for the county of Devon.

Staff update

At the start of 2021 we were fortunate to expand our team, with the following staff joining:

Fiona Wood – Botanical Projects Officer. Fiona joined our field team at the start of the survey season, parachuting into her role whilst some restrictions were still in place due to C19. Focussing mainly on botanical surveys through the year, she is now taking up a post in Dorset surveying their Local Sites network.

Elinor Parry – Habitat Data Project Assistant Officer. Elinor moved to DBRC after having successfully run the Devon Bat Survey within the Devon GHB project. Where she worked closely with DBRC throughout that time. Elinor has spent some of 2021 keeping that bat monitoring work going at a reduced scale, whilst the Saving Devon Treescapes bid was waiting to hear on its success. Although, her main focus has been to work through DBRC habitat datasets, helping us create a much broader and more refined GIS layer, which we hope to supply to clients early in 2022/23.



End of year report 2021 - 2022

Volunteer update

Whilst C19 meant a few additional challenges were thrown at us, we were still able to support a number of new volunteers. Our work on the AWI review provided opportunities for both desk based and field based input, and Adam and Phil were grateful for the patience and enthusiasm of those involved. In addition, we had a successful summer looking to secure up to date records of water vole presence in the Avon Valley

Financial Summary

During the year we maintained our income from Service Level Agreements, and continued to hold our rates in the face of increased pressure from rising costs, and the need for investment in staff and technical resources. However, we have had to increase these as we go into 2022/2023 inevitably.

Project income has grown significantly in the last two years, as we have continued to develop key partnerships. DBRC has also taken on multiple large scale, multi year projects such as the review of the Ancient Woodland Inventory, and development of the Nature Recovery Networks.

Investment in IT resources and the BlueSky Imagery continue to be core costs that need to be financed sustainably, and we again invested in this area throughout the year.

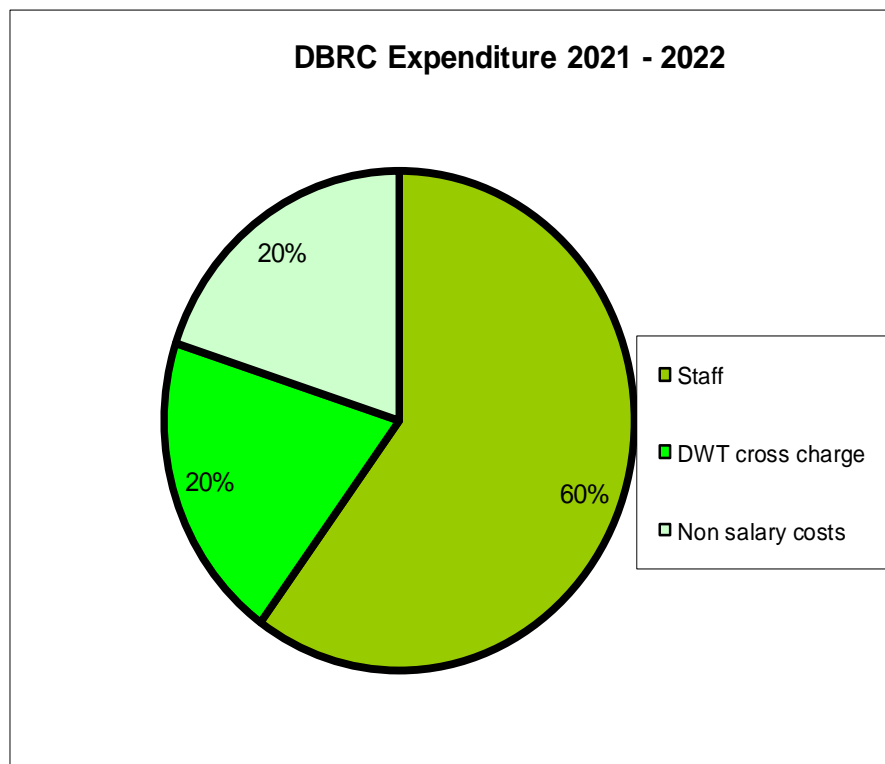
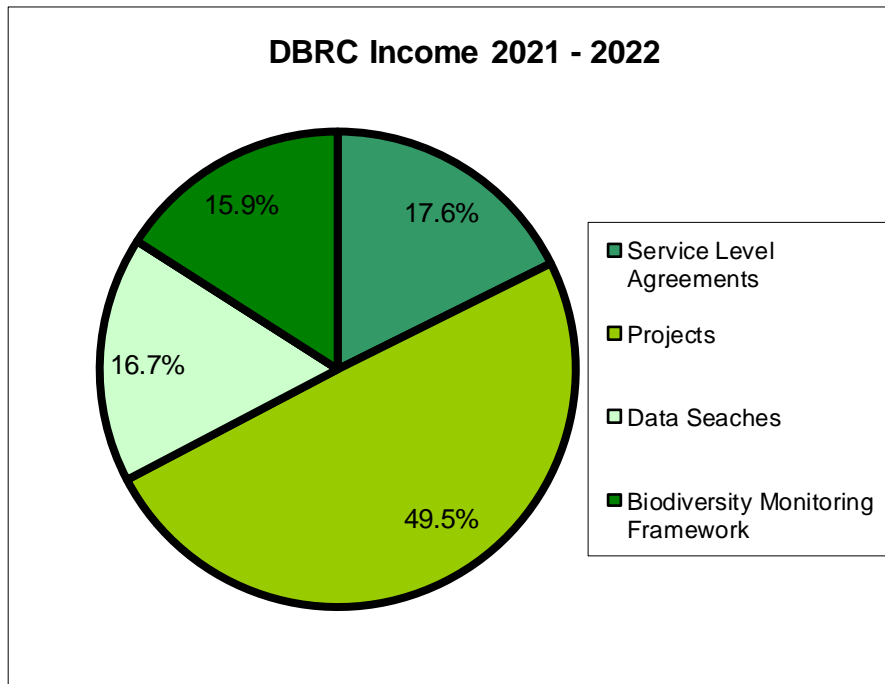
Our non salary costs increased in 21/22 principally through use of contractors within two of our field survey projects. This allowed us to deploy survey staff over many more sites within the AWI review, and undertake a wood pasture pilot funded by the Woodland Trusts Green Recovery Fund project.

I am pleased to say that we ended the year with a small surplus (circa 8k) which will be invested into DBRC. This includes acquiring a drone and specialist software to augment our current survey resources. And staff time to further develop data flow into DBRC, through interactive mapping tools being embedded within our website, during 2022/2023.



End of year report 2021 - 2022

The charts below show:





End of year report 2021 - 2022

Our continued thanks to all those who have supported DBRC through the course of the year.

If you have any questions on the work DBRC undertakes, or you would like to discuss potential projects, please do get in touch iegerton@devonwildlifetrust.org