

## End of year report 2022 - 2023

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### Introduction

I'm going to start this report by saying a huge thank you to all of our partners, stakeholders and clients, who helped us achieve what we did last year. We had post Covid uncertainty, cost of living rises, staff turnover, and a move out of our office to contend with, but amongst all of that, we had our busiest year ever. Thanks also goes to the dedicated team at DBRC which expanded during the year, with two new roles being created. Without their patience and endeavour, we wouldn't be able to deliver on our mission, and keep providing key services and support to so many conservation projects and initiatives.

Over the last 12 months there have been some real achievements, including, Adam and Phil hitting the final stages of the three year Ancient Woodland Inventory Review. We just missed out on finishing it by the end of the financial year, as originally planned. But as I write this, they are making the last determinations, resolving some of the last sites, and it will now be handed over to Natural England in the middle of this month. The scale of that task has been herculean, and whilst few users of the new version will be aware of what went into creating it, we definitely know, and carry a few scars, and an overspend to soak up. However, its future use in protecting ancient woodland, is a legacy we can be proud of.

One of the few positive things that came out of the pandemic, was the use of home working options, something DBRC grasped with both hands. Having successfully navigated that temporary change, we decided to make it permanent last year, and officially became officeless at the end of March. That required the digitisation of thousands of documents, and files, but provides us with a more sustainable way of working, with staff living in differing areas of the county, and reduced travel. A great team effort on making it happen, and with great support from our host DWT. Commuting into Exeter everyday already seems a long time ago.

Whilst this report is never going to be able to cover all of the things that have happened in our world over the last 12 months, I hope it provides a snapshot.

Ian Egerton – DBRC Manager

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### Headline figures from 2022 – 2023

- DBRC databases now hold in excess of 7.4 million species records
- We hit an all time high on delivery of data searches (over 600) for ecological consultants, woodland planting schemes & the general public
- Over 60 Wildlife Sites (CWS & UWS) were resurveyed within the Biodiversity Monitoring Framework project
- With 33 new CWS being designated
- DBRC delivered or worked within over 40 partnership projects of varying scope and scale

### Species Records Highlights:

*Orsodacne cerasi* was recorded for only the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in Devon, the first being in 1979. Phillip Sansum recorded it in June in the Lemon Valley, Newton Abbot, which was very apt, as it was whilst working with the Bradley Bug Recovery Network Project. Phil had been supporting the project training volunteers in species ID and survey techniques, and considering its mostly a well worn and much used public space on the edge of a big town, it just goes to show what can be found when you have a look.

We received a record of the Necklace Ground Beetle (*Carabus monilis*). It used to be common in southern England, but has declined dramatically and is now rare and very local. It is classified as Endangered in the UK.

Emily Spraggon from DWT spotted a sawfly (*Cimbex conatus*) in Exeter. It was only found in southeast Britain, but has been spreading north and west since the 1990s.

A green-winged orchid appeared in Ludwell Valley Park, Exeter last year. It's not particularly common in Devon, though is mainly found in southern & eastern parts of the county.

Andrew Cunningham (Devon Fly Group) recorded the rare hoverfly *Callicera aurata*, in Tiverton in August.





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During the year Devon Moth Group received records which included a number of new species to the county. These included;

*Eupithecia egenaria*, (Pauper Pug). **Nationally Scarce** and likely to be a new colonist from elsewhere in England – recorded by Mark Marshall

*Aplasta ononaria*, (Rest Harrow). **Nationally Rare** and a migrant individual – recorded by Luke Harman

*Caloptilia populetorum*. Probably a recent move into Devon from elsewhere in the SW – recorded by Nick Pratt.

Whilst Chris Vincent recorded this species whilst it was nectaring on *Buddleia auriculata* in Plymouth - *Eremohadena chenopodiphaga* (Salsovian). A nationally new record of this migrant moth.

Devon has a number of specialist species groups which provide a phenomenal depth of knowledge, that both DBRC and others often rely on. If you are interested in finding out more about any of these groups, feel free to contact us and can provide their details.

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### Projects and Initiatives – Summary:

Please see our website for more up to date information, and to keep informed as new projects come forward. <https://www.dbrc.org.uk/projects-surveys/current-projects-and-surveys/> But here are but of a few of the things we did in 22/23

### 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 provides invaluable intelligence on the condition of many of our priority habitats, outside of the statutory sites framework.

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.

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. An amazing 33 new sites were designated, some which came through as a direct result of our growing work with local communities.

As part of the ongoing development of this project, we have been working with a range of volunteers in targeted parishes, over the last two years. Supporting existing community groups within the Teignbridge Wildlife Warden Scheme, and the pilot within Mid Devon. Due to those growing relationships, the enthusiasm and time invested by those individuals, and the training we can provide them, a number of the surveys which were carried out last year were undertaken entirely by volunteers. Volunteers also shadowed our surveyors on some surveys, which helps embed skills and increase their confidence in undertaking their own surveys.

Upskilling people who have passion and commitment for our natural environment sits so well with our core mission, but has limited funding in our work program. However, we hope to continue to build on what's already been achieved, and further expand the number of parishes we can work with in 23/24.

Our thanks also go to the members of the CWS panel, who diligently support the designation process, and who sit through a very long day, and review evidence on each site each year. Their expertise alongside that of our team, ensure robust implementation of the criteria which guides the framework.

The BMF project remains at the heart of DBRC's field activity, and gathering condition 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.



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If you are able to help DBRC by providing survey data on CWS, or have a CWS that hasn't been surveyed for many years please go to - <http://www.dbrc.org.uk/biodiversity-monitoring-framework/> .

### **Bradley Bug Network Project – Green Futures, Newton Abbot**

In 22/23 Phil Sansum our Projects Team Leader, was able to work with the Green Futures Team (a local community organisation founded in 2020, and based in Newton Abbott). Over the course of the year, working with local groups and partners, four target areas were identified for monitoring activity. Phil then worked with the project as it rolled out a program of training and participation in surveying for invertebrates, and provided a technical lead in relevant areas, which included data capture techniques and species ID. Whilst the project was focused within the Bradley Valley, an area of the larger Lemon Valley which sits on the edge of the town, this initial pilot is hoped to be the first step in developing a much larger project across the area. <https://www.greenfutures-newtonabbot.co.uk/bradley-bug-recovery-network>

### **Network for Nature – National Highways**

Working for Highways England, and in partnership with DWT & Animex, DBRC will be using its data to model areas within our counties A road network, where significant species mortality, pinch points in connectivity (their movement through the landscape) and other challenges occur, due to these routes and associated traffic/infrastructure. Using modelling techniques which include Habitat Suitability Mapping and Landscape Fragmentation/Connectivity mapping, we will be able to help identify areas where interventions may have a positive impact. These may include culverted underpasses, green bridges, tree planting or other techniques. We are just about to start the project and more information will be available as its progresses.

### **Sowing the Seeds Habitat Mapping – Exmoor National Park**

The main project is focused on enhancing existing grassland networks and working with landowners to create new areas of priority grassland habitats. DBRCs part although small, was important, as it helped the project identify areas to prioritise. Using aerial photo interpretation, we were able identify numerous sites remotely, and whilst this data isn't as accurate as field scale survey data, it provides a great first filter for the project team.



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### Grand Western Canal Macrophyte Survey

During the summer, DBRC were commissioned to undertake a survey of aquatic plants within the canal, to assist in the ongoing management program of this rich biodiversity resource in Mid Devon. Whilst canals are seen as static waterways, there are still a number of vectors through which invasive plants can get into their systems, and other challenges associated with the surrounding land and its management/use. Its therefore important to monitor the flora of the canal to indicate its condition and direction of travel, which can include certain species becoming too dominant and out competing others. The canal is home to a vast array of invertebrates, mammals and bird species, and the balance that exists between these and the demands placed upon it by recreational use need careful consideration.

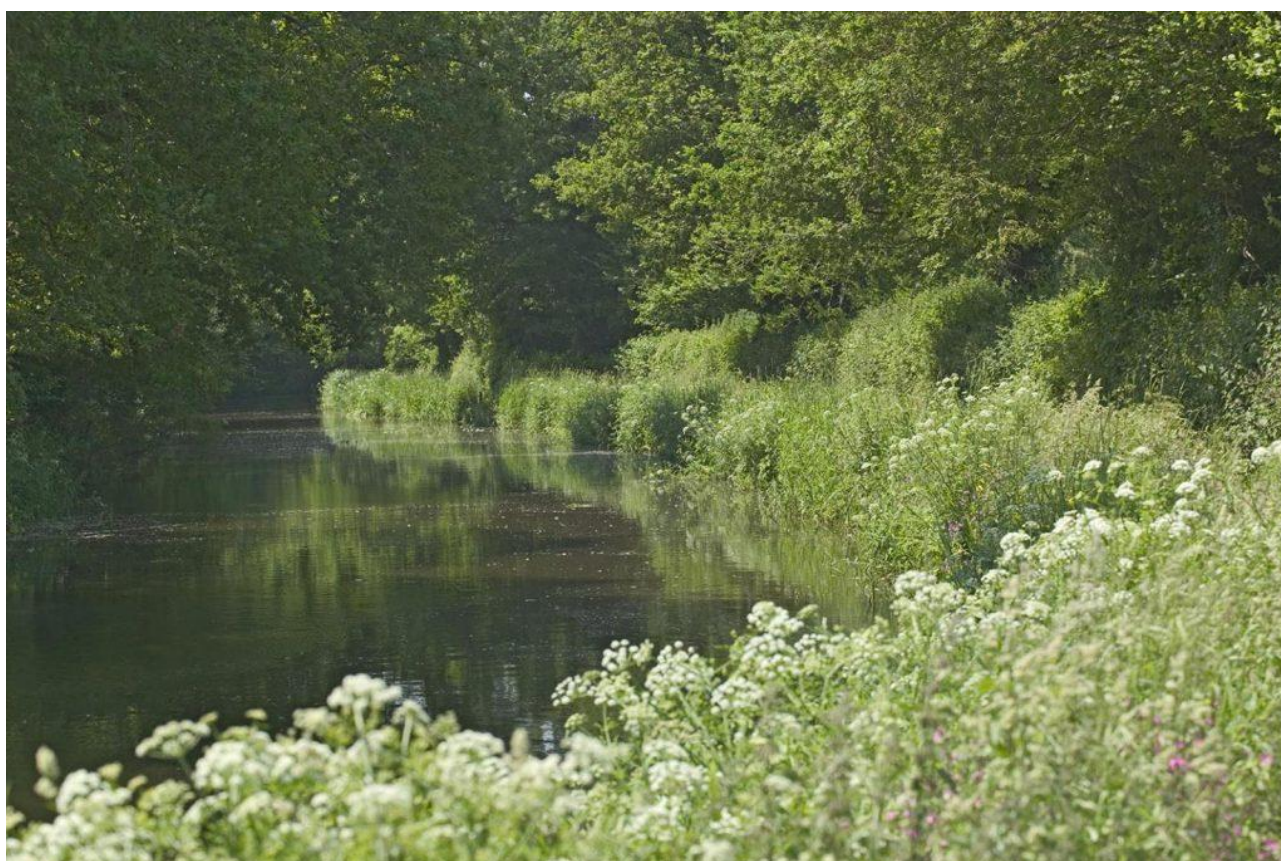


Photo credit: Phil Sansum/Paul Seymour



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### Technical Developments

I don't want to 'drone' on, but we've wanted one for years. and now that we have one (a drone that is), and that Marcus our fully qualified pilot is able to provide us with that capacity, it's been a real addition to our survey work. The quality of images and post flight processing that's possible, using open-source software has added another dimension to how we can monitor sites, changes in vegetation or physical features over time. But it also means getting info on sites that are hard to access, such as saltmarsh, just got a whole lot easier!

### 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 to underpin their decision making processes, and are able to use DBRC time for enquiries or other work. In 2022 – 2023 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
- Forestry England
- Mid Devon District Council
- Network Rail
- 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



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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 **7.4** million species records for the county of Devon.

### Staff Update

Sadly, we lost Fiona Wood from our survey team at the start of last year, with a move to neighbouring Dorset where she took a role leading on their Local Wildlife Site monitoring.

However, during the summer, we expanded our team with Patrick Dreyer, a GIS specialist who came to us from FWAG SW, unfortunately, his time with us was short lived as the lure of riches in the commercial sector was too much to resist in these challenging economic times.

Another addition, Jack Rivers, came on board as an Assistant Survey Officer towards the end of the field season, but quickly got to grips with his role. He was able to act as our link to a number of community groups we were already working with, as Jess Smallcombe our Community Ecologist and our usual lead in that area, went on maternity leave.

Last but not least, Elinor Parry who had been on contract with us for a couple of years, moved on, having secured a species specialist post with Natural Resources Wales.





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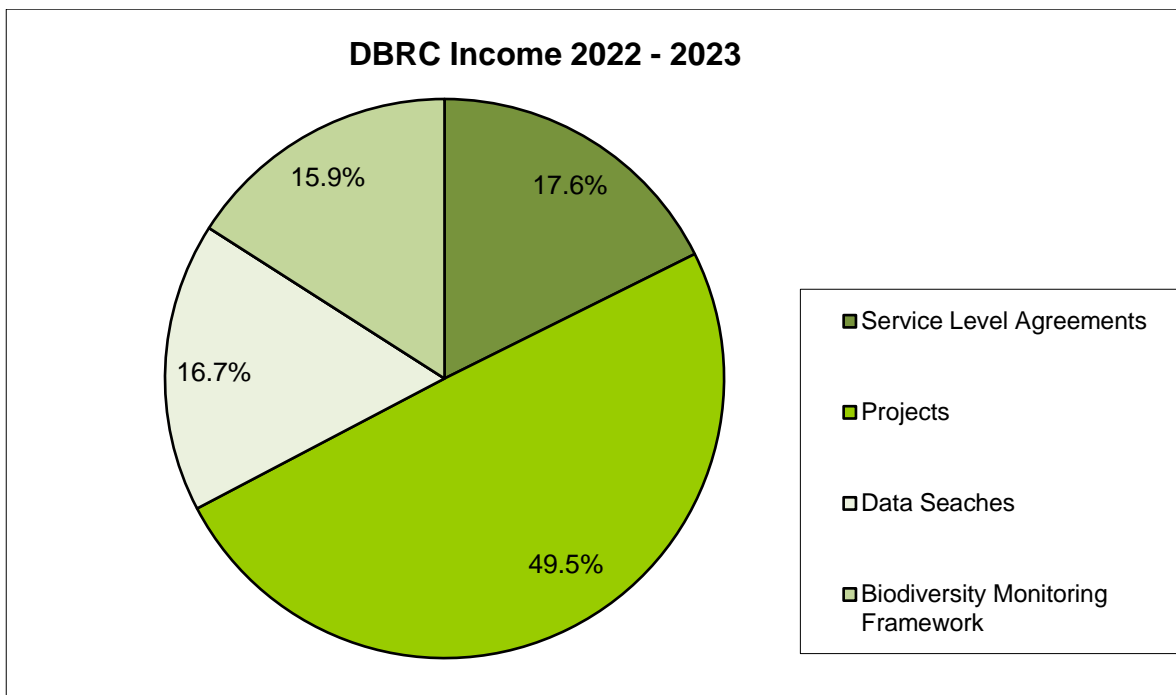
### Volunteer Update

We are grateful for the continued assistance with our data management from Clare, and for the continued input from volunteers into the AWI project. Now that we are office less, we will need to consider how we can best continue to create opportunities for people to get involved with us. It may actually open up more opportunities with people engaging remotely, but time will tell.

### Financial Summary

DBRC had record turnover during 22/23, helped by a host of projects and contracts, but also by a very buoyant development sector, which didn't seem to have slowed down from previous years.

As a Not for Profit organisation, our target is always to end the year with a small surplus, able to be re-invested into the centre, develop new projects, and where possible enable us look to our future needs. In the coming months, our 22/23 surplus will be targeted at helping develop a replacement for the Recorder 6 database, which has underpinned a lot of our data management historically, and that of numerous other organisations. The partnership which is developing the replacement consists of Environmental Records Centres, as well as international organisations such as the Natural History Museum of Luxembourg. Its critical that we all continue to invest in the data architecture that we rely so heavily on, but these things are not cheap, even when collaborating with others for IT solutions. We hope to have the new data base in operation for the 24/25 financial year.

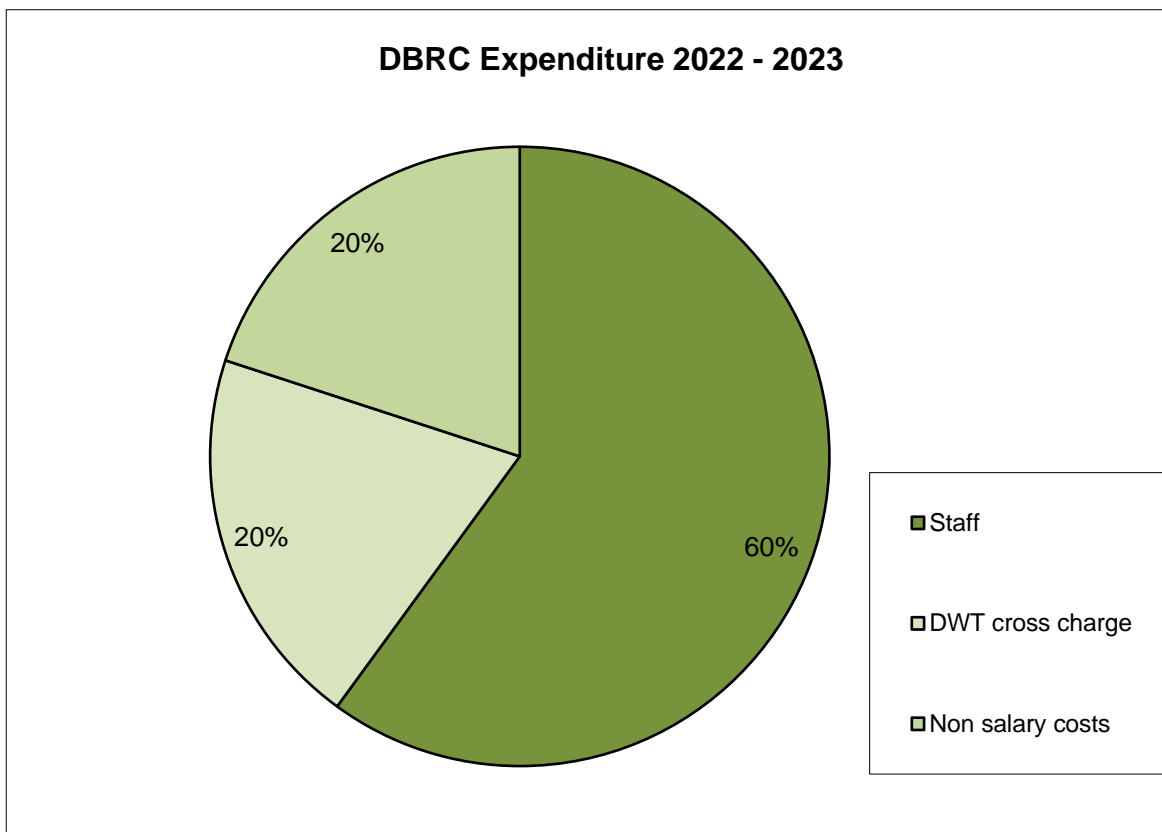




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During the course of the year, we were able to secure a number of new projects as specific funding opportunities arose, as well as deliver within those already planned. However, with a small team this is always challenging, as we need to prioritise time spent on delivery, whilst balancing the needs of developing future projects too. With the majority being 1, 2, 3 or at best, 5-year cycles, this means a regular turnover, and the need to have a pipeline of upcoming initiatives, some of which take several years to gestate.

Data search income increased as the development sector showed little signs of slowing down, and we were able to launch our revised product which now has OS background mapping. However, income from other areas remained static, which in 'real terms' with inflationary costs high, presented ongoing challenges for us.





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Staff costs were affected by a number of personnel changes during the year, and the use of contractors to fill gaps also affected our non-salary costs, however, through good management of other spending areas we were able to remain on budget overall.

However, due to a number of uncertainties about the financial outlook as the year went on, planned investment in our data architecture was pushed into the coming year, something we cannot afford to do again in 23/24.

In the coming year we hope to launch an online habitat mapping tool, increasing flow of this data to DBRC from Partners, and significantly develop how we hold and can analyse much of our data. We will be recruiting to fill gaps in the team, and hoping to find the talent and commitment which we need.

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](mailto:iegerton@devonwildlifetrust.org)