

## **BULLETIN TO INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE – 20 June 2019**

### **2018/19 ANNUAL REPORT ON NORTH EAST SCOTLAND BIOLOGICAL RECORDS CENTRE (NESBReC)**

#### **1 Recommendation**

**The Committee is recommended to:**

- 1.1 Acknowledge the continuing work of the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC), as shown in the NESBReC Annual Report in Appendix 1.**

#### **2 Background / Discussion**

##### Background – NESBReC

- 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 Planning & Building Standards. 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, Scottish Forestry, Cairngorms National Park Authority and RSPB Scotland, as well as having a Service Level Agreement with Aberdeen City Council. Other funding is provided through project work and payment for biological data searches for private organisations.

##### Summary of Annual Report for 2018/19

- 2.5 The Annual Report covers the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019.
- 2.6 The performance indicators show that NESBReC undertook 2,754 biological data searches and added 58,321 species records to the database during 2018-2019. NESBReC also delivered 8 biological training days with 139 attendees and hosted an Annual Recorders Forum which attracted an

attendance of 96 local recorders from all across the North East. In addition, presentations were delivered to various local groups and organisations focussing on public awareness of biological recording.

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

### **3 Scheme of Governance**

- 3.1 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 it relates to the scrutiny of the activity of NESBReC.

### **4 Equalities, Staffing and Financial Implications**

- 4.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required because the Bulletin is to inform the Committee on performance and there will be no differential impact, as a result of this Bulletin on people with protected characteristics.
- 4.2 There are no specific staffing or financial implications arising from this Bulletin but trends are used to inform future budget planning.
- 4.3 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.
- 4.4 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.

**Stephen Archer**  
**Director of Infrastructure Services**

Report prepared by Glenn Roberts, NESBReC, Co-ordinator  
Date: 09 May 2019

## NORTH EAST SCOTLAND BIOLOGICAL RECORDS CENTRE (NESBReC) ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

### PROJECT AIMS AND CASE STUDIES

#### 1.0 Data Searches

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

NESBReC in 2018/19 undertook the following number of data searches:

<b>Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2016/17</b>
No. of Planning Applications searched	2,624	3,019	3,736
Average response time to a Planning Application	2 days	2 days	2 days
No. of Aberdeenshire bridges searched	2	3	5
Other Aberdeenshire searches and requests	40	26	36

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.

<b>Non-Aberdeenshire Performance Indicator</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2016/17</b>
No. of searches and requests for data	93	118	70
Average response time to a search	4 days	4 days	4 days

<b>Commercial requests Performance Indicator</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2016/17</b>
No. of searches and requests for data	37	41	36
Average response time to a search	3 days	3 days	3 days

#### **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 species records within the boundary of a community area so that they could encourage further wildlife recording and habitat management by a local community group.*

*Output: A GIS search of the area was carried out for any relevant data held on the NESBReC database. Data returned to the customer included 127 records of species recorded in the community area in recent years.*

*Outcome: This request was made within the terms of the Service Level Agreement between NESBReC and ACC. The data search was carried out within 4 working days. 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.*

## 2.0 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 2018/19.

<b>Data Management Performance Indicator</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2016/17</b>
No. of records held in database	1,529,599	1,471,278	1,360,754
No. of records added to database	58,321	110,524	71,913

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 Butterfly Conservation and the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland.

### **Case Study 2 – Sharing of Butterfly Species Data with Butterfly Conservation**

*Activity: Liaising with Butterfly Conservation to share moth data collected by volunteer recorders during 2018.*

*Output: A dataset of 2,680 butterfly records from 2017 was exported from the NESBReC database and sent to Butterfly Conservation for them to add to their national database.*

*Outcome: NESBReC was able to provide a significant dataset of recent butterfly data from North East Scotland to Butterfly Conservation for their future use. Furthermore, Butterfly Conservation 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 that has been submitted to various Butterfly Conservation recording schemes. 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.*

## 3.0 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 biological identification training days at different locations around Aberdeenshire was delivered. Subjects covered included: Hoverflies, Camera Trapping for Mammals; Grasses, Sedges, Rushes & Ferns; Fungi; Swifts; Recording for Walking Groups; Coastal Birds; and Trees in Winter. These were available for all to book a place and were free to attend.

<b>Training Days Performance Indicator</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2016/17</b>
No. of training days held	8	8	8
No. of attendees on training days	139	114	126

### **Case Study 3 – Identifying Fungi Event in September 2018**

*Activity: An event held at Balmedie 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 20 attendees at this event who came from all over North East Scotland to learn from a renowned expert. A list of 39 species was compiled for the site from varying habitats. This was one of 8 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 2018-19.*

*Outcome: Feedback questionnaires on the event were collated at the end of the day with very positive responses. This event helped to showcase the dunes and other habitats in Balmedie in a new way 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.*

#### **4.0 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

<b>Recorders Forum Performance Indicator</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2016/17</b>
No. of attendees at Recorders Forum	96	110	96

#### **Case Study 4 – Recorders Forum 2019 Event**

*Activity: The annual NESBReC Recorders Forum was held on 30 March 2019 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 2018-19.*

*Output: A programme of 8 presentations were delivered involving local groups and subjects of local biodiversity interest including: NESBReC update & Pirri Pirri Bur; Scottish Biological Information Forum Review; Monitoring Garden Hoverflies; Fungi in the Scottish Mountains; Northern Brown Argus in North East Scotland; A Ladybird to Look For; Recording Bryophytes in North East Scotland; Capercaillie – the Story So Far. Sufficient break out time was provided on the day to maximise networking between attending recorders and NESBReC staff.*

*Outcome: The event attracted 96 recorders from across the North East. 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 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 (817 “likes” so far and 906 “follows”).

#### **5.0 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.

<b>Engagement with other groups Performance Indicator</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2016/17</b>
No. of presentations and events	14	13	17

Presentations and interaction with various local groups and organisations included: North East Local Biodiversity Action Partnership, North East Local Biodiversity Action Plan Awareness Group, Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) students, Grampian 50+ Network, Duthie Park Environment Day, Tayside Recorders Day; North East Invasive Non Native Species Forum, Ruthrieston Residents Association; Aberdeen University Mayfest; Aberdeen Highland Games; Drum Bioblitz; Turrieff U3A Group; and Westhill Gardening Club. 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, NGOs and other bodies involved in the collation, management and use of biological data.

## **6.0 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. For Aberdeenshire, 7,697 new plant records were collected during the survey.*

*Outcome: Data collected from this survey project is used weekly by NESBReC in Aberdeenshire Council planning application searches. Data will also be used by Aberdeen City Council as part of the three year SLA with NESBReC. The data was also key to the assessment of 17 new Local Nature Conservation Sites for inclusion in the Supplementary Guidance of the next Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan. Species data will be shared with 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 there are conserved for future generations.*