

# **Aberdeenshire Council**

## **NESBReC Strategy Review**

### **2017-20**

“We will collate, manage and disseminate biological data for the benefit of all in order to protect and promote the biodiversity of North East Scotland”



### Summary

The North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) has the job of managing biodiversity data and promoting the natural environment within Aberdeenshire and other local authority areas in North East Scotland. This involves partnership working with a diverse range of bodies including national agencies, community groups and providing support and guidance to a significant number of individuals who regularly contribute species records on a voluntary basis to NESBReC. The core of the Team's work is based around the management of a database of biodiversity information and providing such data to decision makers and other data requestors.

The review of the 2017-20 Strategy is primarily an assessment of key priorities and outcomes achieved by NESBReC over the last three years. Highlights of the 2017-20 period include: generation of £243,687 of external income; the addition of 212,518 new records to the NESBReC database; carrying out GIS searches of 8,142 Aberdeenshire Council planning applications for any biodiversity data; responding to 143 requests for biodiversity data from environmental consultants; responding to 325 requests for biodiversity data from various other sources including individuals and community groups; delivering 23 training events at various locations across North East Scotland with total attendees numbering 325; hosting a Recorders' Forum event annually with total attendees numbering 321; participation in 114 events with local groups and organisations; and the success of the Mammal Atlas publication in raising awareness across North East Scotland and beyond. 1,648 copies of the book were sold in 2017-20, generating additional income for NESBReC.

*Front cover: A species of hoverfly, Scaeva pyrastris, seen in a garden in Inverurie, Aberdeenshire.*

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# 1 Introduction

From mountain to sea, Aberdeenshire boasts a rich and valuable resource in its natural environment. The varied landscape, habitats and native species of North East Scotland are a tremendous resource for both local inhabitants and visitors alike. The area is rich in biodiversity and holds sites of national and international importance.

The North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) has the job of managing biodiversity data and promoting the natural environment within Aberdeenshire and other local authorities. This involves partnership working with a diverse range of bodies including national agencies, community groups and liaising daily with a significant number of individuals who regularly contribute species records on a voluntary basis to NESBReC. The core of the team's work is based around the management of a database of biodiversity information and providing such data to decision makers and other data requestors.

## 1.1 Review of Strategy

NESBReC produced its first Strategy for the period 2017-20. Prior to this NESBReC did not have a strategy document. The Strategy was primarily an Aberdeenshire Council working document to help manage and deliver key priorities, aims and objectives of NESBReC for the period 2017-20. It outlined where NESBReC's objectives would deliver or contribute to the Scottish Government's and Aberdeenshire Council's priorities and provided a structured approach to service delivery.

This Review document will look at whether those key priorities, aims and objectives were achieved and consider some of their outcomes. New and emerging Government and Council priorities, as well as aims and objectives of Scottish Local Record Centres, will be considered for the next Strategy period to ensure that NESBReC continues to deliver national and local priorities. This review will also identify any strategic and operational changes that need to be made going forward to enhance efficiency, performance, recording and reporting, and to continue best practice.

## 1.2 Aberdeenshire Council's Vision for NESBReC 2017-20

It is Aberdeenshire Council's vision to be the best area and the best council in Scotland.

It is NESBReC's aim that good quality data on the biodiversity of Aberdeenshire's unique natural environment should be available to those who live, work and visit Aberdeenshire. In addition, it is also NESBReC's aim to make people aware of the value of these resources and the need to protect and enhance them for future generations through sustainable management. This vision for NESBReC can be summarised as follows:

*"We will collate, manage and disseminate biological data for the benefit of all in order to protect and promote the biodiversity of North East Scotland"*

## 2 Overview of NESBReC Strategy Performance 2017-20

The Strategy's key priorities and objectives were selected to show the connection between the work undertaken by NESBReC and the various national and local strategies, plans and policies that formed the 'Golden Thread' between Scottish Government outcomes and delivery on the ground. The NESBReC Service Strategy 2017-20 identified four Core Objectives to deliver the principal areas of work: management of a biodiversity database; protection of North East Scotland's biodiversity; promotion of the local natural environment; and operational continuous improvement. These four core objectives were then further broken down to identify more specific objectives. Four key priorities were also identified which underpinned the work of NESBReC during the Strategy period. The following sections give an overview of the 2017-20 key priorities and objectives with details of performance and achievements over the period of the Strategy.

### 2.1 Key Priorities 2017-20

Over the 3-year period of the Strategy, the key priorities were achieved.

**Table 1: Key Priorities 2017-20**

Priority	Success Measure	Actual Output	Impact
<b>1</b> Maintain, develop and expand, sustainably, the biological database for the North East of Scotland to ensure biological data is available for the management and promotion of the areas rich natural environment	Increase in records in database	212,518 records added to database	Increased data for access by users  Better management of the natural environment
<b>2</b> Deliver habitat and species surveys to support the work of Local Biodiversity Action Plan, such as, pollinator species, designated species, under recorded species, invasive non-native species, and priority habitats	Increase in habitat survey and support of other projects	Habitat survey work undertaken in 2017-20 in Aberdeenshire and in 2018-20 in Aberdeen City  Support of NE INNS Forum project to record invasive non-native species  Promotion of Aberdeenshire Council's Pollinator Strategy	Increased data for access by users  Better management of the natural environment  Better partnership working  Better public understanding of the natural environment



Priority	Success Measure	Actual Output	Impact
<b>3</b> Promote NESBReC and biological recording throughout the North East of Scotland, particularly targeting volunteering engagement in under recorded and regeneration priority areas	Hosting annual training day programmes and annual Recorders Forum event	23 free training days held across Aberdeenshire with total of 325 attendees	Better public understanding of the natural environment
		4 training days held in regeneration priority areas	Increased volunteer opportunities
	Use of social media for promotion	Annual Recorders Forum event held 2017-20 with total of 321 attendees	Increased skills learning
			Increased well-being
		Participation in 114 events run by other groups	Increased data for access by users
		Regular posts on Facebook	Better partnership working
<b>4</b> Develop and improve further links with other Local Record Centres and national recording schemes	Meeting with Scottish LRCs	2 meetings held with Scottish LRCs	Sharing good practice
	Participation in Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum (SBIF) Review	Participation in SBIF Review workshops and consultations	Development and support for a national biodiversity data strategy
		Attended 6 meetings as a member of SBIF Advisory Board	Increased promotion and representation nationally

## 2.2 Overview of Resources

NESBReC is part of Aberdeenshire Council's Specialist Services Team within the Planning and Environment Service, Infrastructure Services. NESBReC comprises 2.6 (full-time equivalent) staff made up of 1.0 NESBReC Co-ordinator, 1.0 GIS Officer and 0.6 Data Assistant posts. All of these posts were consistent throughout the 2017-20 period. The staff are based in Woodhill House and cover not only the entirety of Aberdeenshire but also Aberdeen City, Moray and the Cairngorms National Park.

NESBReC receives an annual contribution of £16,000 from Aberdeenshire Council for undertaking core work. NESBReC also receives additional income from Aberdeenshire Council for any project work which NESBReC is able to undertake. Aberdeen City Council gives an annual contribution as part of a Service Level Agreement. An annual grant representing around 44% of total expenditure is received from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) (now known as NatureScot). The remaining income is generated by small grants from supporting organisations, project work and ongoing consultancy income. Grant funding from all sources cannot be predicted with any certainty and all are on annual cycles. One financial contributor, RSPB East of Scotland Branch, made a

small annual contribution in 2017-18 and 2018-19 but then ceased contributing in 2019-20. NESBReC aims to operate on a balanced budget (taking into account the £16,000 financial contribution from Aberdeenshire Council for work undertaken and any additional project work above this). However, any under or overspend of this budget is accommodated within the Planning & Environment Service budget.

**Table 2: NESBReC Budget Expenditure including salaries and associated staff costs**

Year	Costs	Income*	Net Expenditure
2017/18	£108,219	£108,506	(£287)
2018/19	£128,214	£127,020	£1,194
2019/20	£110,585	£107,910	£2,675

*\*Please note these income figures include the financial contribution provided by Aberdeenshire Council to NESBReC for core and project work undertaken.*

**Table 3: External Income – Overview of income sources outside Aberdeenshire Council 2017-20**

Income - Source	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-20 Totals
Scottish Natural Heritage	£39,031	£39,294	£40,473	£118,798
Aberdeen City Council SLA	£6,865	£6,845	£6,982	£20,692
Scottish Forestry	£1,800	£1,800	£1,800	£5,400
Cairngorms National Park Authority	£3,000	£3,000	£3,000	£9,000
RSPB	£1,000	£1,000	0	£2,000
Consultancy Income	£7,434	£6,164	£10,322	£23,920
Mammal Atlas Sales	£12,346	£3,117	£2,784	£18,247
Other External Income	£3,830	£33,800	£8,000	£45,630

## 2.3 Team Core Objective 1 - Management

To manage a database of biodiversity information on protected sites, habitats and species and act as a hub for biological information exchange pertaining to the biodiversity of North East Scotland.

**Table 4: Core Objective 1 - 2017-20 Actions and Outcomes**

Team Objectives – Management – Achieved 2017-20				
1. Manage specified datasets on behalf of partners, organisations, groups and individuals				
2. Act as a focus for biodiversity records for the North East of Scotland				
3. Act as a node within the National Biodiversity Network (NBN)				
4. Provide support and guidance for recorders				
Outcomes				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater public access to biodiversity data</li> <li>• Better understanding and management of the local natural environment</li> <li>• Increase in data that is available for access by all users</li> <li>• Increased public participation in reporting local biodiversity</li> <li>• Promotion of local biodiversity to a wider audience</li> <li>• Increased public wellbeing and connection to the natural environment</li> </ul>				

**Table 5: Core Objective 1 - Performance Indicator**

Performance Indicator	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-20 Totals
Number of new records	110,524	58,321	43,673	212,518



- 2.3.1 Over the three-year period of the Strategy NESBReC processed and added 212,512 new records of species occurrence to the NESBReC database which equates to an average of 70,839 records per year.
- 2.3.2 Records were received from volunteer recorders across North East Scotland in a variety of ways according to individual preference. Some recorders sent in large datasets in Excel in a format outlined by the NESBReC Species Recording Template. Some recorders preferred to use the NESBReC website online recording form. Some recorders sent emails with photos and record details attached for identification and feedback. Records and photos were also submitted through the NESBReC Facebook page. A few recorders posted in records in hard copy format (paper) for transcription by NESBReC – these recorders usually did not have access to a computer.
- 2.3.3 Datasets were uploaded directly to the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Atlas with due regard to the NBN guidelines to avoid duplication. Large datasets were shared with other national recording schemes, significantly the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (BSBI) and Butterfly Conservation, for them to upload to NBN, thereby avoiding any duplication of data. Uploading data to the NBN Atlas enables the biodiversity of North East Scotland to be well represented in a respected UK database that is queried by users from all over the world. See Case Study 1.
- 2.3.4 Data on habitats and species was collected every year of the Strategy period as Project Work for Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen City Council. See Case Study 2.

## Case Study 1      Sharing of Plant Species Data with BSBI

<b>Activity</b>	Liaising with Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (BSBI) to share plant data.
<b>Output</b>	A dataset of 66,009 plant records was shared with BSBI in 2019 for them to add to their national database.
<b>Outcome</b>	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.

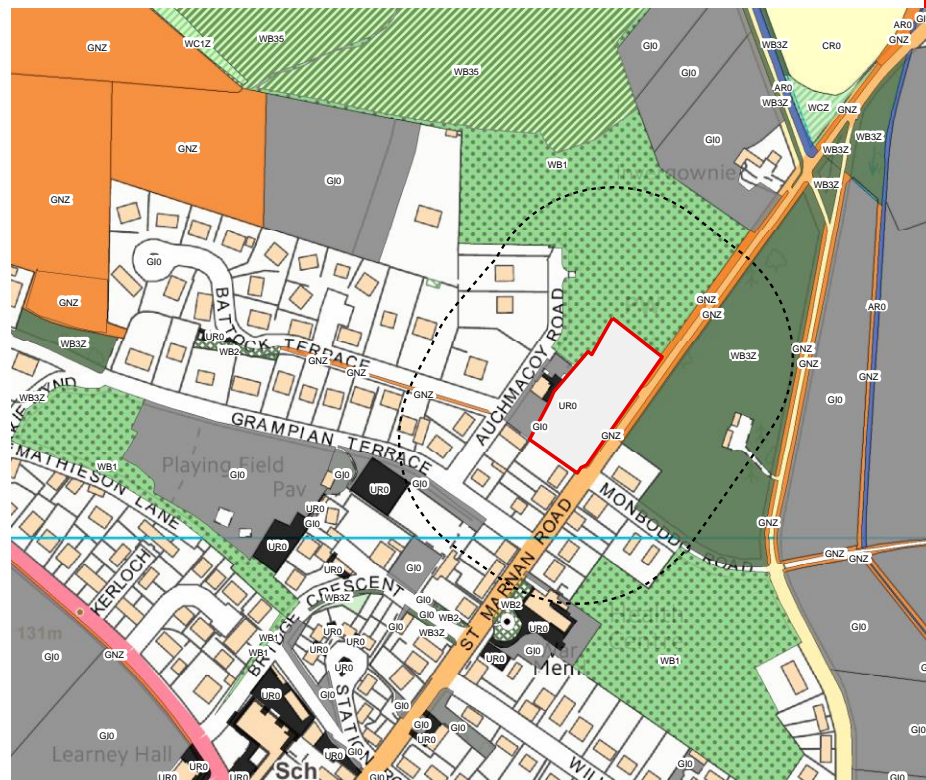
**Photo 1: Northern Marsh Orchid recorded at Peterhead in 2017**



## Case Study 2 Habitat Survey in Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City

<b>Activity</b>	Project to map habitat compartments using the Integrated Habitat System and to record plant species in areas of Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City in order to inform various biodiversity strategies, procedures and planning policy documents.
<b>Output</b>	Habitat maps of various areas were produced in GIS format and plant species records generated for the NESBReC database.
<b>Outcome</b>	Data collected from this survey project is used weekly by NESBReC in Aberdeenshire Council planning application searches. Aberdeen City Council also query the data as an output of the three-year SLA with NESBReC. The data is also used by both local authorities in the assessment process of any new Local Nature Conservation Sites to inform their upcoming Local Development Plans. This helps ensure there is good data available for the planning process and better protection is provided to some of the most sensitive habitats and species within Aberdeenshire.

**Photo 2: Habitat compartments at Torphins mapped in GIS format and how they relate to a particular planning application as part of NESBReC's weekly planning searches**



## 2.4 Team Core Objective 2 - Protection

To provide baseline biodiversity information to help decision makers make the best choices for the protection of the biodiversity of North East Scotland

**Table 6: Core Objective 2 - 2017-20 Actions and Outcomes**

### Team Objectives - Management – Achieved 2017-20

1. Supply data to decision makers, educational establishments, private business and the public
2. Provide input into national policy and guidance development
3. Act as a node within the National Biodiversity Network (NBN)
4. Work in partnership with relevant individuals, groups and organisations at national, regional and local level to share knowledge and best practice

### Outcomes

- Better protection of the natural environment
- Better understanding and management of the local natural environment
- Greater public access to biodiversity data
- Increased sustainable development

- 2.4.1 Over the three-year period of the Strategy NESBReC searched Aberdeenshire Council planning applications weekly for any data held on notable species, habitats and sites of interest. Other requests from the Council were made on an ad hoc basis to inform various strategies, plans and reports.
- 2.4.2 Searches for environmental consultants were buoyant over the three-year period with 2019-20 significantly higher than previous years. These commercial requests took in additional income for NESBReC and also helped to ensure that developers were accessing local biodiversity data to inform potential development in North East Scotland.
- 2.4.3 Searches for other non-Aberdeenshire Council requests came from a range of

requestors including students, local groups, NGOs, researchers, national recording schemes, community groups and individuals.

**Table 7: Core Objective 2 – Performance Indicators**

<b>Performance Indicator</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>	<b>2017-20 Totals</b>
Number of Aberdeenshire planning applications searched	3,019	2,624	2,499	8,142
Other Aberdeenshire Council data requests	26	40	33	99
Number of searches for environmental consultants	41	37	65	143
Number of other non-Aberdeenshire Council searches	118	93	114	325



### Case Study 3      Example of a search request from Aberdeen City Council

<b>Activity</b>	Request for data from a Planner at Aberdeen City Council for any data on notable species, habitats and designated sites within the boundary of a new housing development site in Bridge of Don, with the inclusion of a 100m buffer from the boundary.
<b>Output</b>	A GIS search of the area was carried out for any relevant data held on the NESBReC database. Data returned to the customer included 26 records of 20 notable species and information on one Local Nature Conservation Site as well as a full coverage habitat map.
<b>Outcome</b>	This request was made within the terms of the Service Level Agreement between NESBReC and Aberdeen City Council. 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, enabling higher quality decisions to be made with the information, and ensures better protection of biodiversity within the area. NESBReC receives annual income from Aberdeen City Council in return for delivering this service through the terms of the SLA.

**Photo 3: One of the priority species reported in NESBReC searches is Lapwing**





## 2.5 Team Core Objective 3 – Promotion

To help promote understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment to everyone, and to ensure it is at the heart of community wellbeing, economic development and sense of place.

**Table 8: Core Objective 3 - 2017-20 Actions and Outcomes**

Team Objectives - Promotion – Achieved 2017-20	
1. Promote, encourage and co-ordinate biological recording among the wider community	
2. Provide training days as appropriate	
3. Support the work and projects of the North East Scotland Local Biodiversity Partnership	
4. Maintain and update the NESBReC website and social media	
5. Participate in relevant promotional events that highlight the biodiversity of NE Scotland	
6. Provide support and guidance for recorders	
7. Work in partnership with relevant individuals, groups and organisations	
Outcomes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater awareness and understanding of North East Scotland's natural heritage</li> <li>• Increased biodiversity skills learning</li> <li>• Increased biological recording among the wider community</li> <li>• Increased partnership working with a range of groups and organisations</li> <li>• Increased public wellbeing and connection to the natural environment</li> <li>• Increased skills learning</li> <li>• Increased volunteering opportunities</li> <li>• Greater public access to biodiversity data</li> </ul>	

- 2.5.1 Over the period of the Strategy NESBReC provided 23 free training events for the wider public at various locations throughout Aberdeenshire. See Case Study 4.
- 2.5.2 An annual Recorders' Forum event was held every year over the Strategy period with a combined attendance of 321. See Case Study 5.
- 2.5.3 Biological recording was encouraged through the NESBReC website and Facebook page<sup>1</sup>, as well as regular information sharing with the NESBReC contacts list and answering daily queries from volunteer recorders directly via email.
- 2.5.4 NESBReC worked with and supported colleagues, partners and communities on the following projects and initiatives to protect and enhance biodiversity:-
- NESBiP Awareness Group
  - NESBiP Pooling Our Ponds project
  - Aberdeenshire Local Nature Conservation Sites Assessment Panel
  - Cairngorms Nature Festival
  - Duthie Park Bioblitz and Environment Days
  - NTS Drum Castle Bioblitz
  - Turriff Show
  - Wild About Aden
  - Grampian 50+ Network
  - Bennachie Visitor Centre
  - University of Aberdeen Careers Fair
  - University of Aberdeen Mayfest
  - Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels
  - North East Invasive Non-native Species Project & Forum
  - Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum
  - Aberdeen Highland Games
  - Grampian Fungus Group
  - Biological Recording in Scotland
- 2.5.5 NESBReC delivered presentations to various local groups to raise awareness of local biodiversity and to promote biological recording for NESBReC. These groups included:
- Airyhall Primary Eco Group
  - Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (BSBI) Scotland
  - Cromar Future Group
  - Elgin Museum
  - Gillian Martin MSP
  - ISC Sustainability Committee
  - Mannofield Church Eco Group
  - NE Invasive Non-Native Species Forum
  - Ruthrieston Residents Association
  - Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) students

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<sup>1</sup> The Facebook account and content is managed and delivered by NESBReC, without any additional support from internal or external sources.

- St Fittick's Church Group
- Tayside Recorders Day
- Turriff U3A Group
- Westhill Gardening Club

2.5.6 NESBReC published a book in 2017 titled, *Mammal Atlas of North East Scotland and the Cairngorms*. Using data held at NESBReC, it covered the 43 species of mammal that had been recorded living wild in North East Scotland and was a collaborative effort with contributions from local experts, local recorders and local photographers. The book was sold in retail outlets across North East Scotland and free copies were also provided to local libraries and schools. See Case Study 6.

**Table 9: Core Objective 3 - Performance Indicators**

Public Engagement – Performance Indicator	2017- 18	2018- 19	2019- 20	2017- 20 Totals
Number of public training events	8	8	7	23
Number of attendees on training events	118	93	114	325
Number of attendees at Recorders' Forum	110	96	115	321
Number of other events attended and presentations to groups	13	14	14	114

Case Study 4	Identifying Fungi Training Event at Balmedie in September 2018
<b>Activity</b>	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.
<b>Output</b>	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 of fungi was compiled for the site from varying habitats. This was one of 8 events held in the NESBReC area on varying topics during 2018. They were free to attend and 44% of the costs were covered as a key output from the Scottish Natural Heritage grant for 2018-19.
<b>Outcome</b>	This event helped to showcase the dune, grassland and woodland habitats in Balmedie Country Park as well as gathering important data for the local area and the NESBReC database.
<b>Photo 4: Dune Cup, an uncommon sand dune fungus found at Balmedie during the fungi training event in 2019.</b>	

## Case Study 5      **Recorders Forum 2020 Event**

<b>Activity</b>	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.
<b>Output</b>	A programme of 8 presentations were delivered involving local groups and subjects of local biodiversity interest. Sufficient breakout time was provided on the day to maximise networking between attending recorders and NESBReC staff. During this breakout 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.
<b>Outcome</b>	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. 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.

**Photo 5: Recorders' Forum attendees during the networking session in the foyer of the Zoology Building, University of Aberdeen**





## Case Study 6 Mammal Atlas of North-East Scotland and the Cairngorms

<b>Activity</b>	Project to produce a book showing the distribution of mammal species in North East Scotland between 1960-2015. This project encouraged public participation among all experience levels to record all mammal species.
<b>Output</b>	The book was published in Spring 2017 and 2,000 copies were printed. The format was an A4 sized, 180-page, full colour paperback with text and photographs supplied by local experts and photographers. Distribution maps were produced for the 43 species of mammal that had been recorded in North East Scotland. This is the first ever mammal atlas for North East Scotland.
<b>Outcome</b>	The amount of mammal data in the NESBReC database was significantly increased. The book is an excellent example of “Citizen Science” and a useful tool to promote NESBReC’s work, encourage further biological recording and to raise awareness of the diversity of mammal species to be found in North East Scotland. The book was a visible product that was stocked in 44 retail outlets in North East Scotland during the Strategy period. A free copy of the book has been supplied to every library and school in Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City. NESBReC was been invited to deliver several presentations in 2017-20 focussing on the Mammal Atlas as a subject. 1,648 copies of the book were sold in 2017-20, generating additional income for NESBReC.

**Photo 6: Mammal Atlas for sale in a local outlet near Methlick**





## 2.6 Team Core Objective 4 - Operational

To work as part of continuous service improvement.

**Table 10: Operational improvements - 2017-20 Actions and Outcomes**

### Team Objectives – Operational – Achieved 2017-20

1. Develop and maintain a team Strategy and Action Plan
2. Ensure staff CPD requirements are met
3. Maintain Key Performance Indicators
4. Provide performance reports
5. Maintain continuous service improvements

### Outcomes

- Understanding and communication of Team priorities, aims and objectives
- Defining roles within the Team.
- Better team working and service delivery
- Staff and service requirements met through CPD and service improvements
- Continual improvement
- Demonstration of service value

- 2.6.1 Over the period of the Strategy NESBReC's operations and performance have been underpinned by these documents and arrangements:
- NESBReC Strategy 2017-20
  - NESBReC Team Annual Action Plans
  - NESBReC Management Team – at least 6 meetings per year
  - NESBReC Advisory Group meetings – two meetings per year
- 2.6.2 NESBReC has continued to pursue a programme of continual professional development. Over the three-year period of the Strategy members of

NESBReC attended various training courses, seminars and workshops to increase knowledge and skills; kept up to date with legislation, guidelines and research; and benefited from examples of best practice to ensure a good delivery of service.

### 3 NESBReC Strategy 2017-20 Discussion and Looking Forward to 2020-23

#### 3.1 2017-20 Strategy Review Discussion

- 3.1.1 The NESBReC Strategy 2017-20 was the first Strategy produced by NESBReC. Overall, the aims and objectives were achieved and the Strategy can be considered a success in terms of how it focussed the Team's aims and working practices in a concise format. This Review document illustrates that NESBReC delivered the actions outlined in the Strategy. However, the review process also highlighted improvements and amendments that could perhaps be made to the structure and content of future strategies.
- 3.1.2 Future strategies could perhaps facilitate further monitoring of performance for reporting purposes in order to reflect the depth and range of NESBReC's work as it evolves depending on changing funding requirements and local and national priorities. However, care should be given to only introduce new monitoring of key performance criteria that can be measured annually over the whole period of a three-year strategy. The Key Performance Indicators were certainly helpful since they covered a lot of easily measurable indicators that are at the core of NESBReC's work.
- 3.1.3 The NESBReC Vision was a successful encapsulation of what NESBReC's focus was for the period of the Strategy – *"we will collate, manage and disseminate biological data for the benefit of all in order to protect and promote the biodiversity of North East Scotland"*. However, upon reflection reference should also have been made that biological data is used for informing decisions relating to the enhancement of biodiversity in North East Scotland.
- 3.1.4 The four Core Team Objectives (Management, Protection, Promotion and Operational) were achieved and were an effective way to describe the rationale for NESBReC's main areas of work. The four Key Priorities were also achieved for the most part and provided another focus for what was required in the three-year period.
- 3.1.5 The 2017-20 Strategy included reference to the Golden Thread and this helped to show how the work of NESBReC delivered on many national and local priorities and objectives.

#### 3.2 Recommendations for the NESBReC Strategy 2020-23

- 3.2.1 The NESBReC Vision should remain the same except for the addition of the word enhance. As the biological data is also used for informing decisions relating to the enhancement of biodiversity in North East Scotland. The revised vision should read as follows: *"we will collate, manage and disseminate biological data for the benefit of all in order to protect, promote, and enhance the biodiversity of North East Scotland"*. Management of data is certainly at the heart of everything NESBReC does on a daily basis and this statement should be easily understood by anyone connected with NESBReC,

be it NESBReC staff, Aberdeenshire Council colleagues, Councillors, volunteer recorders or potential financial supporters, among others.

- 3.2.2 NESBReC will help to deliver Aberdeenshire Council, Scottish Government, and even international outcomes, targets and aims. Featuring the Golden Thread table in the Strategy demonstrates how the work of NESBReC fits with and delivers on many national and local priorities and objectives.
- 3.2.3 A three-year period is a good length of time for developing a Strategy and for delivering on its aims. It is also able to reflect any major change in direction due to changing circumstances. Therefore, the next Strategy should relate to the period 2020-23.
- 3.2.4 Future strategies could perhaps include further monitoring of easily measured indicators. The Key Performance Indicators used in 2017-20 should remain since they cover a lot of easily measurable indicators that are at the core of NESBReC's work. Two possible additional indicators could be the number of new recorders sending in records and the number of followers on the NESBReC Facebook page. These indicators would further demonstrate certain aspects of public engagement and participation.
- 3.2.5 Future Strategies should be flexible documents and amendments to the Annual Action Plan should respond to any new or different opportunities and requirements. Possible new areas of work may be directed by project funding and may only apply to funding in a single financial year. Such work can then be incorporated into the relevant Annual Action Plan.
- 3.2.6 The four Core Objectives of the NESBReC Strategy 2017-20 (Management, Protection, Promotion and Operational) should remain but should be renamed as "Aims" so that they follow the same terminology of other strategies within the Specialist Services Team.
- 3.2.7 The four Key Priorities were successful in 2017-20 and should be largely retained but should be updated slightly for the period 2020-23 in order to align more closely with the three pillars of Aberdeenshire Council's Priorities: Our People, Our Environment and Our Economy.
- 3.2.8 It is important to note that there may be some change to the scope and resources of NESBReC after the SBIF Review process is completed. SBIF's Review of the Biological Recording Infrastructure of Scotland was presented to Scottish Government (SG) in November 2018 and a response is expected in 2020-21 about whether a new system will be supported by SG after a fully costed business case was also presented by SBIF in December 2019. The Covid-19 pandemic has momentarily ceased progress but the SBIF Advisory Group will endeavour to receive a final response from SG on the proposal. Any new national system for biological data management that comes from this process will take a few years to develop in all parts of Scotland and it is anticipated that any major changes to NESBReC's role would not be rolled out until 2022-23 at the earliest.

- 3.2.9 It is also important to mention how the Covid-19 pandemic may alter operations in the period 2020-23. At the time of writing, the pandemic is five months old and there are restrictions on individuals in terms of travel, meetings, events and using workplaces. All NESBReC staff are working effectively from home with good support from Aberdeenshire Council. The one aspect of the Strategy that cannot be delivered in this situation is physical attendance at events and hosting public training days out in the field. It may be that these can be adequately delivered using online technology instead and that this becomes the default way of communicating and promoting the biodiversity of North East Scotland during the period 2020-23. As the national and local picture develops in a Covid-19 world, some operations will have to adapt accordingly. Such changes, temporary or otherwise, can then be highlighted in the Annual Action Plan.

# Appendix 1

## NESBReC Strategy

### 2017-20

The strategy is primarily an Aberdeenshire Council working document to help manage and deliver key priorities of NESBReC for the next 3 years.

“We will collate, manage and disseminate biological data for the benefit of all in order to protect and promote the biodiversity of North East Scotland”



## 1. INTRODUCTION

From mountain to sea, Aberdeenshire boasts a rich and valuable resource in its natural environment. The varied landscape, habitats and native species of North East Scotland are a tremendous resource for both local inhabitants and visitors alike. The area is rich in biodiversity and holds sites of national and international importance.

The North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) has the job of managing biodiversity data and promoting the natural environment within Aberdeenshire and other local authorities. This involves partnership working with a diverse range of bodies including national agencies, community groups and most importantly a significant number of individuals who regularly contribute species records to NESBReC. The core of the team's work is based around the management of a database of biodiversity information and providing such data to decision makers and other data requestors.

## 2. SCOPE OF STRATEGY

The strategy provides a structured approach to service delivery for the three-year period 2017-20. The strategy is primarily an Aberdeenshire Council working document to help manage and deliver core objectives and key priorities of NESBReC. The Strategy also provides opportunities to improve efficiency, participation and collaboration with key stakeholders and partners and embed best practice in the delivery of NESBReC's objectives.

This Strategy shows where NESBReC delivers or contributes to Scottish Government and Aberdeenshire Council priorities and recognises the financial support of Aberdeen City Council, the Cairngorms National Park Authority, Forestry Commission Scotland and RSPB East of Scotland Branch.

Through the period of the strategy there will be a requirement to consider the challenges of our changing environment and the changing needs of our present and potential user groups. To reflect these changes and challenges, an Annual Action Plan will be prepared which will provide detailed actions on the delivery of the strategy and will reflect new and emerging priorities.

## 3. NESBReC TEAM VISION

It is Aberdeenshire Council's vision to be the best area and the best council in Scotland

It is NESBReC's aim that the benefits gained from Aberdeenshire's unique natural environment should be available to those who live, work and visit Aberdeenshire, and that the value of these resources, and the need to protect and enhance them for future generations through sustainable management, is understood. This vision for NESBReC can be summarised thus:

"We will collate, manage and disseminate biological data for the benefit of all in order to protect and promote the biodiversity of North East Scotland"

#### **4. ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL NESBReC TEAM - RESOURCES**

NESBReC is part of Aberdeenshire Council's Specialist Services Team within Infrastructure Services. NESBReC comprises 2.6 (full-time equivalent) staff made up of 1.0 NESBReC Co-ordinator, 1.0 GIS Officer and 0.6 Data Assistant posts.

The staff are based in Woodhill House and cover not only the entirety of Aberdeenshire but also Aberdeen City, Moray and the Cairngorms National Park. The financial budget for 2016-17 predicts total income of £85,565. NESBReC receives an annual contribution of £16,000 from Aberdeenshire Council and £6,865 from Aberdeen City Council. A grant of £38,400 will be received from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) in 2016-17. However, SNH funding is now on an annual cycle and long-term funding from this source cannot be predicted with any certainty. The remaining income is generated by small grants from supporting organisations, project work and ongoing consultancy income.

#### **5. POLICY CONTEXT – *The Golden Thread***

In order to understand the connection between the work undertaken by NESBReC and the various national and local strategies, plans and policies, the following summarises the link between them all:

##### ***A) National Strategy & Policy***

1. Scottish Government National Outcomes
2. Scottish Biodiversity Strategy - The 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity
3. National Planning Framework 3
  - a. Scottish Planning Policy
4. National Tourism Development Framework

##### ***B) Aberdeenshire Council Strategies & Plans***

1. Aberdeenshire Council Single Outcome Agreement 2013-23
2. Aberdeenshire Council Community Plan 2011-15
3. Aberdeenshire Council Plan 2013-17
4. Infrastructure Services Service Plan 2016-19
5. Local Development Plan (2012 and 2016)

##### ***C) NESBReC Strategy & Plans***

1. NESBReC Strategy 2017-20
  - a. NESBReC Annual Team Work Plan
  - b. NESBReC Annual Individual Work Plans

Aberdeenshire Council NESBReC Team Golden Thread				
Scottish Government Purpose	To focus government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth.			
Scottish Government National Outcomes (A1)	National Outcome 10 We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need	National Outcome 12 We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations	National Outcome 13 We take pride in a strong, fair and inclusive national identity	National Outcome 15 Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs
SG National Plans, Policies & Strategies (A2-4)	A2) Scottish Biodiversity Strategy - The 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity		A3) National Planning Framework 3	A4) National Tourism Development Framework
			A3a) Scottish Planning Policy	
			A3b) Planning Advice Note 2/2011	
Aberdeenshire Council Vision	Serving Aberdeenshire from mountain to sea – the very best of Scotland			
Aberdeenshire Council Plans & Strategies (B1-5)	B1) Aberdeenshire Council Single Outcome Agreement 2013-23		B2) Aberdeenshire Council Community Plan 2011-15	
	B3) Aberdeenshire Council Plan 2013-17			
	B4) Infrastructure Services Service Plan 2016-19		B5) Local Development Plan	
NESBReC Team Vision	We will collate, manage and disseminate biological data for the benefit of all in order to protect and promote the biodiversity of North East Scotland			
NESBReC Strategy (C1)	C1) Aberdeenshire Council NESBReC Strategy 2017 - 2020			
NESBReC Plans (C1a-b)	C1a) Annual Team Work Plan		C1b) Annual Individual Work Plans	

## 6. NESBReC STRATEGY - CORE OBJECTIVES

The NESBReC Strategy Core Objectives have been drawn together to reflect the above strategies, plans and policies. The strategy objectives provide a common framework for a customer and performance focussed service which works in partnership with stakeholders to deliver a high quality, efficient service which provides best value.

The Annual NESBReC Action Plan (Appendix 1) provides the detailed actions the team will take to achieve the strategy objectives for not just Aberdeenshire but the whole of the North East of Scotland within NESBReC's remit and it indicates how the core outcomes of the team will be measured. The NESBReC Team will use the NESBReC Strategy and the Annual Action Plan to develop individual annual work programmes.

The core objectives are divided into three principal areas of work as reflected in the NESBReC Team's Vision.

### NESBReC Team Core Objectives – Management

A core objective of the NESBReC Team is to manage a database of biodiversity information on protected sites, habitats and species and act as a hub for biological information exchange pertaining to the biodiversity of North East Scotland.

Objective	Description	Golden Thread Relevance (see table in Section 5)
1	Manage specified datasets on behalf of partners, organisations, groups and individuals	A1, A2, A3a, A4, B5,
2	Act as a focus for biodiversity records for the North East of Scotland	A1, A2,
3	Act as a node within the National Biodiversity Network	A1, A2, A3a, B5,
4	Provide support and guidance for recorders	A1, A2, A4,

### NESBReC Team Objectives - Protection

A core objective of the NESBReC Team is to provide baseline biodiversity information to help decision makers make the best choices for the protection of the biodiversity of North East Scotland.

Objective	Description	Golden Thread Relevance (see table in Section 5)
1	Supply data to decision makers, educational establishments, private business and the public	A1, A2, A3a, A4, B5
2	Provide input into national policy and guidance development	A1, A2, A3a, B5
3	Provide input into Local Development Plan process	A1, A2, A3a, A3, A3a, A3b, B5
4	Work in partnership with relevant individuals, groups and organisations at national, regional and local level to share knowledge and best practice	A1, A2, A3a, A4, B1, B2, B3, B4

### NESBReC Team Objectives - Promotion

The remit of the NESBReC Team is to help promote understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment to everyone, and to ensure it is at the heart of community wellbeing, economic development and sense of place.

Objective	Description	Golden Thread Relevance (see Section 5)
1	Promote, encourage and co-ordinate biological recording among the wider community	A1, A2, A3a, A4,
2	Provide training days as appropriate	A1, A2, A4,
3	Support the work and projects of the North East Scotland Biodiversity Action Partnership	A1, A2, A3a, A4, B1, B2, B3, B4,
4	Maintain and update the NESBReC website	A1, A2, A4, B1, B2, B3,
5	Participate in relevant promotional events that highlight the biodiversity of North East Scotland	A1, A2, A3a, A4, B1, B2, B3, C1,
6	Provide support and guidance for recorders	A1, A2, A3a, A4,

7	Work in partnership with relevant individuals, groups and organisations	A1, A2, A3a, A4, B1, B2, B3, C1,
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In addition to the objectives detailed above, the NESBReC Team as part of continuous service improvement will also undertake the following:

#### **NESBReC Team Objectives - Operational**

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Golden Thread Relevance (see Section 5)</b>
1	Develop and maintain a team Strategy and Action Plan	C1, C1a, C1b
2	Ensure staff CPD requirements are met	C1, C1b
3	Maintain Key Performance Indicators	C1
4	Produce performance reports	B4, C1
5	Maintain continuous service improvement	B1, B3, B4



## 7. NESBReC STRATEGY - 4 KEY PRIORITIES FOR 2017-20

Four key priorities have been identified which will underpin the work of NESBReC during the strategy period. The Strategy is however intended to be a flexible document and can be amended through the Annual Action Plans to reflect new and different opportunities and requirements. The priorities are:

Objective	Description	Golden Thread Relevance (see Sect 5)
1	Maintain, develop and expand, sustainably, the biological database for the North East of Scotland to ensure biological data is available for the management and promotion of the areas rich natural environment	C1, C1a, C1b
2	Deliver habitat and species surveys to support the work of Local Biodiversity Action Plan, such as, pollinator species, designated species, under recorded species, invasive non-native species, and priority habitats.	C1
3	Promote NESBReC and biological recording throughout the North East of Scotland, particularly targeting volunteering engagement in under recorded and regeneration priority areas	B4, C1
4	Develop and improve further links with other Local Record Centres and national recording schemes	B1, B3, B4

## 8. ADDITIONAL LEGISLATION, POLICY AND GUIDANCE

NESBReC's work also supports the following legislation, policy and guidance:

- Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development)(Scotland) Amendment Order 2011
- Marine (Scotland) Act 2010
- Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011
- Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004

- National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000
- Protection of Badgers Act 1992
- National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949
- Birds Directive 1979 (79/409/EEC)
- Habitats Directive 1992 (92/43/EEC)
- Planning Advice Note 40 Development Control
- Planning Advice Note 52 Planning in Small Towns
- Planning Advice Note 54 Planning Enforcement
- Planning Advice Note 71 Conservation Area Management
- Planning Advice Note 72 Designing Safer Places
- Planning Advice Note 78 Inclusive Design Scotland