

# NBRC Newsletter 10

August 2015

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## Manager's Note

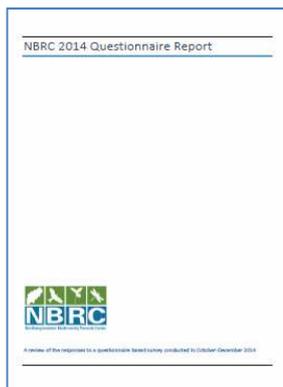
It's been a busy time for NBRC in recent months, with some of what we'd planned postponed so that we could take advantage of the opportunities presented by the NBN Data Capture Initiative. With the rest of this year set to be just as busy, it was a real pleasure to join so many of the county's recorders at this year's NBRC Bioblitz at Polebrook Airfield – and to be serenaded by nightingales too. Not bad for what was our substitute site for 2015. Rachel did a marvellous job in pulling everything together and the icing on the cake was quite literally that, in the form of NBRC's logo, thanks to James. Next year's bioblitz (and cake) will have a lot to live up to. And we're looking forward to achieving a lot in the meantime. Very best wishes from the NBRC Team.

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## NBRC News

### NBRC Questionnaire

Now available on NBRC's website is our report summarising responses to last year's consultation. Rather than a few simple yes/no or multi-choice questions, we asked respondents to give quite some thought to different aspects of the records centre's work, how well it has or hasn't succeeded overall and exactly what we should most usefully address in future.



This must have been quite a chore for all who participated, and we're extremely grateful for every response. This was a really valuable stock-taking exercise which yielded numerous useful comments (Well worth a look), and provided an evidence base for our future plans.

It is evident that, whilst we have quite a way yet to go, opinion is generally in favour of NBRC's activities and development in the recent past. Over the next few years, we'll seek to maintain and build on this goodwill by ensuring that we are in a better position to meet the needs of recorders, survey organisers, and all sorts of information users.

### WILDside Bid

One of the ways we hope to take several steps forward is via our proposed WILDside project, for which we are seeking funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund's *Our Heritage* grant scheme.

The overall aim of the project will be to strengthen recording networks across the county, through collaborations between recorders, NBRC, Wildlife Trust staff, and both the Kettering & District and Northamptonshire Natural History Societies. As well as promoting wildlife recording in general, WILDside will target taxonomic and geographic gaps in the county database and provide much more information about what occurs at a number of Local Wildlife Sites, whilst focussing on enabling new and existing recorders to develop and extend their identification, survey and recording skills.

Our first application lost out to other proposals considered by the HLF panel in June, but the need to promote biological recording in Northants was recognised. Following advice from HLF, we'll be submitting a revised bid, with additional supporting information, at the end of August. We should know the outcome by late October.

In follow up to the brief piece in our last newsletter, the Cabinet Office eventually decided to fund the rest of the National Biodiversity Network's planned Data Capture Initiative, intended to digitise a broad range of historic datasets (including several identified by NBRC).

This was definitely good news, but it did mean a mad dash to find additional people to tackle a huge amount of work in an increasingly short amount of time, with the Christmas break resulting in further delay.

Briefly, in addition to our permanent staff, NBRC had 8 extra people working between 2 and 4 days a week, either as temporary officers or contractors. For a short time, we were one of the largest local records centres in the land, with boxes of recording cards and notebooks, whizzing across the county. The main task was digitising the estimated 200,000+ bird records from 1981-1999, which actually turned out to be 270,000+ observations but by this time the Cabinet Office had provided additional funds, so we were able to tackle these 'extras' too. Gradually, the number of digitisers reduced, the boxes and part boxes of processed data were restored to the office and the part-completed boxes juggled about to suit. By this stage we were also processing the digitised data, ready for verification, and grappling with the various interpretations of the handwritten names of thousands of locations scribed onto record cards.

In addition to the 1981-1999- 'Big Bird' dataset and an assortment of even earlier avian records from the Northants Natural History Society's archives, we've tackled a bevy of butterflies from the county and a swarm of beetles from all over the UK, as well as delving into floral records from the majority of Northamptonshire's churchyards. As a result, bar some sorting out and checking of the more problematic observations, NBRC will soon have added more than 300,000 extra records to the county database, (equivalent to

more than half of what's currently there), as well as to the NBN Gateway.

There were lots of individual highlights amongst all these records, including one for which D.J. Watkins Pitchford was one of the observers, assorted first county records and an entire aviary's worth of escaped exotics. With the series of bird records it was also possible to pick up on changes over time. Collared dove would be an obvious example, but major declines were apparent as well as expansions). Now we have the digits to hand, rather than just cards sitting locked away in a cupboard, we're looking forward to seeing what they tell us about changes in Northamptonshire's countryside. There's also a chance to compare similarities and differences in the flora of the county's churches and, thanks to more recent surveys, to investigate then and now changes indicated by recent surveys.

As well as simply adding to the mass of usable data available for this county (and many others in England), the first NBN Data Capture Initiative has provided us with a lot of extra data to think about. As for other historic datasets, for Northampton and VC32 – old notebooks, dusty invertebrate collections, shoeboxes of data cards under the bed - we'll be very pleased to know about these in preparation for whatever new DCI emerges. Our grateful thanks to all our digitisers and to everyone who contributed records and has helped with verification. *[Steve produced a related [article](#) for NBN's e-News. This newsletter is well worth subscribing to for UK-wide news.]*

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## NBRC: Looking forward to 2016



Next year will see NBRC reach its tenth year. There's a lot we want to achieve in the meantime (and after) but we'll certainly have to do something to mark this special anniversary. We're open to suggestions, so please drop us a line or two with your ideas at [NRBC@northantsbrc.org.uk](mailto:NRBC@northantsbrc.org.uk).

## County recorder changes

### Introducing the new county recorder for water bugs – Kevin Rowley



Kevin Rowley....as probably a water bug recorder should be...in water and with net in hand

I took over the Water Bugs recorder role from Tony Cook last year as he has stepped up to run the National Scheme, taking over from Sheila Brooke. He has supported me well so we won't lose that experience but hopefully I can bring my own perspective and enthusiasm to the role.

I have always had an interest in wildlife and been a leisurely bird watcher for many years. For the last 6 years I have been a volunteer with the Wildlife Trust Ecology Groups and with Graham Warnes and John Showers we have been monitoring Aquatic Invertebrates in the Nene Valley. From here my affinity, interest and identification skills have grown. At work I am a Project Manager/Business Analyst and although Systems and Business processes can be an acquired taste, the skills transfer well and wildlife is much more interesting.

Water Bugs are in the order of Hemiptera and part of the sub-order Heteroptera (true bugs) together with land bugs. They all have a tubular mouth piece to stab and suck up liquids from both plants and animals. There are 86 species nationally. With a good number of upland and coastal species we should be able to record just over 50 species in Northants.

So in my first year I set about creating a base set of data and managed to pull together c4600 records consisting of 42 species from 120 sites. It is a really good start and thanks to The Environment Agency for providing their data from within the Nene Valley. From this I have managed to create a provisional atlas <https://sites.google.com/site/northantswaterbug/s/>.

While this is not quite robust enough yet, it has allowed me to get some focus and motivation around what to do next. I am looking to get this data loaded on the NBN gateway for others to see and also a few squares and species still to get around. There are not too many people recording but I am keen to work with a few more Reserve Managers and organisations like Froglife, Wildlife Trust etc. to see if we can drum up some more records and monitors.

*Kevin Rowley*

### News of the NBN

Following extensive consultations the National Biodiversity Network has published a new [strategy document](#) and a [strategic actions plan](#) which it has invited individuals and organisations to sign up to or take a lead in. What results from these will be of considerable importance for the future of biological recording and its support as a whole.

NBRC will be playing its part in relation to action plan delivery.



Carole Hanney, Purple Emperor on the Earlstrees Industrial Estate, Corby July 2015.

## An enormous contribution...

After nearly 40 years John Ward has decided to relinquish his position as county macro moth recorder. John took over this role in 1977 from Peter Gent. John recalls,

*I was about eight years of age at the end of the last war and the father of one of my friends was interested in moths. On several occasions on summer evenings that year father and son were catching moths by torchlight in their garden and identifying the species with the help of a neighbour who was more expert than my friend's father. Although very young I immediately became strongly interested in learning the names of the moths and all that I could about them, and with their help I was able to put a name to some of the moths that we had seen. Even then there seemed to be a lot of Heart & Darts, and Yellow Underwings about. This sowed the seeds of my interest which continues to this day.*

*In the 1970s Peter Gent, who was then the County Moth Recorder, decided to relinquish his post. I already knew Peter and respected his easy expertise, and knew that he would be a hard act to follow, but as no one else seemed to want the job I allowed my name to go forward. From my point of view the rest is history, all that remains is for me is to wish my successor all the best with the job. In this context, it is worth my saying that the job has expanded considerably along with the greater interest in moths, with recording and computer aspects being far greater than formerly. This is particularly true since the [Moth Group Website](#) was set up in 2003. Subsequent to this of course, Mark Hammond thankfully became involved as the Records Collator.*



Dotted Fan-foot (Macrochilo cribrumalis) from Polebrook Airfield, James Skinner. Only the fourth VC32 record for this nationally notable species.

## Introducing the new county recorder for macro moths – Mark Hammond



Mark Hammond, with his able assistant (long suffering wife), Julianne

I have been interested in moths since I was knee-high to a caterpillar, but strayed into other pursuits in my late teens and early twenties, before making a return about 25 years ago. I started as most did, with an interest in the larger moths, mostly found in my garden or seen on daytime walks. My interest now covers all species and I'm actively trying to bring myself up to speed (with considerable help from David Manning) on the micros! Since the mid-1990s I have been working closely with John and David to assist in the establishment of the Northants Moth Group, maintaining the website, and to create a database of as much of the modern and archived moth records as possible.

## Moth recording in Northamptonshire (VC32)

Interest in moth recording has seen significant growth in recent years, and as hobbies go, it is one that has the potential to add significant knowledge of ecosystems, habitat changes, climate change, etc. There is a core of active moth recorders in the county, who mostly operate moth traps in their gardens, but also partake in field trips around the county. Some of these are put on for public consumption (e.g. Moth Night events – this year one at Stanwick Lakes on 12<sup>th</sup> September).

### Northamptonshire Moths Website

<http://www.northamptonshirewildlife.co.uk/nmoths/nmothsindex.htm>

We are very happy to receive records of moths from anyone interested and able to do so, thus if you are able to submit any sightings for the vice county, we would be very keen to receive them – no matter if from the previous year, gleaned from old notebooks from times past, or simply as a quick email of a recent sighting or query/casual observation. Ideally records should take include when and where you saw the moth (an address, site name and a six-figure grid reference if at all possible). Please note that some species can be quite difficult to identify, so a photograph of the moth may be asked for in order for it to be accepted. If in doubt, even a quick photo using a smart phone is better than no photo at all. All records are included in the county database, which is then copied at the end of each recording season to the NBRC and to the National Moth Recording Scheme, operated by Butterfly Conservation. BC moth staffs are currently in the process of updating the provisional atlas of distribution in readiness for publication again in a couple of years – so your records can add “dots on the map”!

I will do my best to respond to any queries and comments in a reasonable timeframe (although still being in full-time employment often means that correspondence is confined to evenings and weekends), so do please drop me a line.

**Macro-moth recorder** - Mark Hammond  
[mark.hammond1966@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:mark.hammond1966@hotmail.co.uk)

**Micro-moth recorder** - David Manning:  
[micromoths@bnhs.org.uk](mailto:micromoths@bnhs.org.uk)



An unusual form of the migrant species, The Gem (*Orthonama obstipata*), with an incomplete central band across its wings taken by James Skinner in Stoke Wood.

## Brief summary of 2014 macro-moth records

A total of 20,140 records were received, compared to 23,869 in 2013 and 17,716 in 2012. There were a lot of macro moths new to 10km squares

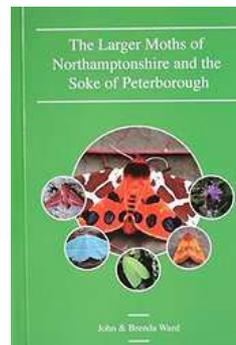
<http://www.northamptonshirewildlife.co.uk/nmoths/New%2010Km%20grid%20records%202014.htm>.

Unfortunately this did not include any new species for VC32 but it is extremely pleasing to have received so many records, and I'd like to thank all contributors for submitting their records. All records have now been submitted to the National Moth Recording Scheme operated by Butterfly Conservation.

Mark Hammond

## New County Atlas

### The Larger Moths of Northamptonshire and the Soke of Peterborough by John & Brenda Ward



Released in August 2015, this is the first time that the vice-county's moths have been specifically reviewed since Eustace Wallis wrote the Lepidoptera of Northamptonshire between 1908 and 1912.

The hardback [book](#) contains write-ups of the 648 larger moths recorded in the vice-county since the earliest records in 1840. Moths that have been recorded within the past 50 years are illustrated and dealt with in greater detail. This results in some 90% of the entire county species list being illustrated.

The book is priced at £16.50 and you can order a copy from John or Brenda via email, [bjward@btinternet.com](mailto:bjward@btinternet.com).

## 2015 Bioblitz - Polebrook Airfield Nature Reserve



Polebrook Airfield, Nathalie Hueber

Polebrook Airfield Nature Reserve is a great example of nature reinstating itself on an abandoned airfield site, currently a private nature reserve. The 31.5 hectare site has a mix of habitats at various stages of succession as the old bunkers, buildings and foundations are gradually being covered by calcareous grassland, open ground, scrub and young woodland.

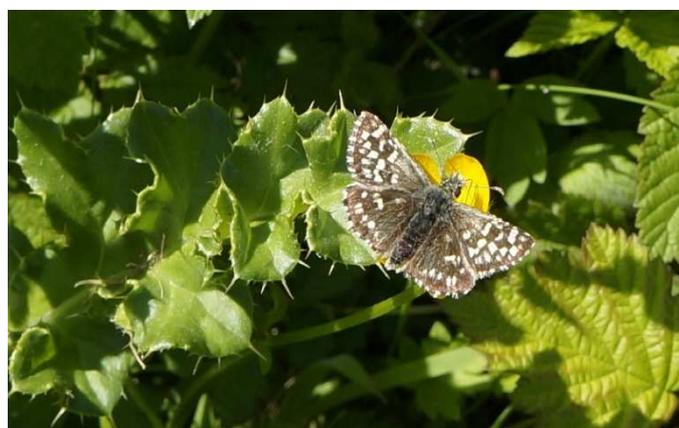
This year's event was held on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of June and was well attended by our dedicated recorders and naturalists. Saturday evening there was a focus on direct searching until dusk. Our aquatic bug and beetle recorders Kevin Rowley and Graham Warnes counted an initial 23 species and spotted a freshly emerging Broad-bodied Chaser in the pond before moving on to one of the old bunkers containing some water and aquatic plants.



Getting ready for the bat survey, Nathalie Hueber

After dusk, two groups carried out bat recording along a pre-defined route whilst moth recorders prepared for and began their evening of recording.

On Sunday we had some lovely warm weather while recorders continued to explore the site and search for as many different species as they could. A good number of taxon groups were covered during the event including; birds, butterflies, true flies, vascular plants, lichens, water bugs and beetles, ground beetles, plant galls, moths and small mammals. Grizzled skippers and small heath butterflies were seen by most and an array of bees and wasps were out making the most of the sunshine.



Grizzled Skipper (*Pyrgus malvae*), Nathalie Hueber

A brief survey by our county recorder for bryophytes, Rachel Carter, was undertaken during the appropriate season in February which revealed an impressive 41 species. Rachel also collected some aquatic plant samples during the event for her husband Chris, to check for algae.

We have already started receiving records back and are looking forward to being able to provide you with a full update of the number of records and species recorded for the site in our next newsletter.

Finally, we would like to say a huge thank you for the continued support and participation at our annual event. We hope you enjoyed being serenaded by the nightingales, turtle doves and a very persistent cuckoo whilst feeding on the NBRC logo cake courtesy of James Skinner.



The increasingly famous 2015 Bioblitz NBRC logo cake, Steve Whitbread

## Volunteers Wanted

NBRC can set up projects for volunteers able to commit their time on an occasional basis over several months or more whether working from home or joining us at Lings House. Thanks to a change in office layout we now have desk space for six and are keen to put this to best use.

Whether processing datasets for species groups in which you have a particular interest, extracting historic records from a variety of sources or analysing data already in the system we would be very grateful for your help.

We can also set up particular projects. As an example, and in conjunction with the Wildlife Trust's Planning and Biodiversity Officer, we are keen to see to what extent biodiversity information is employed and considered in respect of different types of planning application or within local authority strategies in Northamptonshire, and so put forward recommendations as to how it might be made more accessible, and more easily put to use.

**Sustrans'** national Greener Greenways Project includes recording and management along the Brampton Valley Way. See their latest [newsletter](#) for more information.

And have a look at **Froglife's** [Nene Dragonfinder Project](#) too.

## What's in a name?

For many years, NBRC and other local records centres have been known as *local records centres* (or by some as local record centres). This generic term even appears in Government documents. This is fine for those who already know what they are - and who were probably recording wildlife long before their local centre's establishment. However, with regard to the great majority of people, it was thought there was danger of confusion with *local records offices* (which focus more on people) and this was probably what prompted the naming of the body created to represent local records centres' interests as the *Association for Local Environmental Records Centres* (ALERC).

**Biological** **Environmental**  
**Records**  
**Centre**  
Recording Ecological  
Data Information Biodiversity  
Service

Individual centres will keep retain their established names. As this 'wordle' of the names of all (our type of) records centres shows there is quite a lot of variation around the central themes, reflecting the diversity in records centres' interests, origins and responsibilities. As of this year, however, the accepted descriptive term is *Local Environmental Records Centre*, so NBRC is now 'officially' your LERC.

## NBRC Steering Group

The group that advises on and monitors the work of your record centre includes representation from the Wildlife Trust, N.C.C., Natural England, and the Environment Agency as well as the County's Recorders' Group next meets in September.

If you have any suggestions, questions or issues that you'd like to raise, please pass them to the Recorders' Representative, John Showers. ([showersjohn@gmail.com](mailto:showersjohn@gmail.com))

## Student Project Opportunities

With a growing database we welcome student projects that might make use of the records held by NBRC or provide data to help to fill particular geographic, taxonomic or habitat shaped gaps.

E-mail [NBRC@northantsbrc.org.uk](mailto:NBRC@northantsbrc.org.uk) and let us know what you might be interested in.

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## Information

James, Rachel and Steve attended this year's conference of the National Forum for Biological Recording, held jointly with the British Ecological Society. A Question of Ecology – Answers from Biological Recording focussed on how ecological questions and issues might be addressed with biological records and on how volunteer recorders and academics/researchers might best be brought together to their mutual benefit. The conference report will soon be available via the [NFBR website](#).

We have recently imported an update to the micro moth dataset into Recorder 6 and this has also now been uploaded to the NBN Gateway. This means we now have all records up to the end of 2014 with a few for 2015. Our thanks go to David Manning for sending this to us.

<https://data.nbn.org.uk/Datasets/GA001328>

This dataset has public access on the Gateway and it is good to see that the information is being used for conservation purposes with organisations such as JNCC, Bug Life, Natural England and Environment Agency using the data.

We would like to say a special thank you to all the Recorders who help in verifying records for us. Having caught up in the wake of the NBN DCI project, we are continuing to send incidental records to our County Recorders on a regular basis. As we process further older datasets for different species groups, we will get these out to County Recorders as soon as possible and then extend the programme of rolling updates.

## Plans for 2015-16

NBRC is a relative youngster, so far as the majority of records centres are concerned and lags behind most in various ways, despite recent advances. The WILDside project would definitely put us in a better position to support recording in the county, so one of our main challenges over the next twelve months will be to get ourselves in a position to make the project as successful as possible. This will include

- creating the new NBRC website
- cleaning up the Recorder database (to ensure that it is free of duplication and errors)
- drawing up and initiating a programme for tackling the back log of data sets shared with NBRC by county recorders in the recent past
- completing the editing/correction of the Local Wildlife Sites database citations
- identifying volunteer and student projects that might contribute to the county database, puts it to use, or helps to identify, prioritise and address existing gaps
- establishing clear and practicable procedures for the day to day operation, governance and development of the Records Centre

This last point is important because it will ensure that all staff and volunteers will be following the same processes and because it will help us on the way to achieving ALERC accreditation.



Just one of our recent incidental records. A Tortoise Shieldbug *Eurygaster testudinaria*, a species that varies quite widely in colouration. Anne Donnelly recorded this final instar nymph at Fermyn Woods on July 6<sup>th</sup>.

## Contact Details

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