

*Speckled bush-cricket (Leptophyes punctatissima) Photo credit: Nathalie Hueber*

# Annual Report 2017-18

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## Introduction

The Northamptonshire Biodiversity Records Centre (NBRC) is a not-for profit, impartial, independent provider of biodiversity and geographical information. The centre launched in 2006 for the custodianship and provision of biological data in Northamptonshire. The centre is one of nearly fifty county-based Local Environmental Records Centres operating across the UK whose collective aim is to support biological recording, data curation and provision of environmental information for decision-making.

The NBRC are members of the national Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC), the National Biodiversity Network (NBN), the National Forum for Biological Recording (NFB), and the county's Biodiversity Partnership and Local Nature Partnership (LNP).

Our Steering Group is comprised of representatives from a range of interested parties representing service level partners, biological recorders and environmental researchers. The group is chaired by Dr. Duncan McCollin, Senior Lecturer at the University of Northampton, and meets three times a year to oversee and support NBRC strategic direction.

NBRC is hosted by the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire (Wildlife Trust BCN) in their Northampton Office.

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Our website <http://www.northantsbrc.org.uk/> includes our current organisational policies and is where we aim to add newly approved policies during 2018-19.

## 1.1 NBRC Aims & Objectives

### **Our Vision**

*A modern, effective & trusted centre for local wildlife recording and biodiversity information access*

### **Our Mission Statement**

The Centre exists

*To champion and support all aspects of biological recording in Northamptonshire,*

by;

- offering a local facility for the collection, validation, verification, collation, storage, analysis, sharing and use of environmental data;
- providing access to an effective evidence base to guide strategies, plans and decisions that have potential to impact on biodiversity; and
- sharing biodiversity information more widely;

in order to

- increase understanding of the natural environment, and
- ensure that development and natural resource management achieve better, more sustainable outcomes within and beyond the county.

### **Our Values**

Independent, straightforward, helpful and evidence-led, we are honest, professional, and impartial in the services and support we provide to all. We are committed to:

- Working collaboratively with others;
- Promoting and valuing the efforts of the county's biological recorders and organisations that utilise biodiversity information;
- Being a learning and enabling organisation;

- Developing our services, technical skills and information infrastructure to continually meet a range of user needs;
- Conducting our business with integrity in an open, honest, transparent and accountable way;
- Making the most of available information whilst recognising its limitations and seeking future improvements;
- Recognising and investing in our staff and volunteers as our greatest resource.

## Our Objectives

**Ensure access to quality biodiversity information** through developing our skills and services to meet the needs of environmental decision makers, maintaining data quality and security and continually achieving operational financial security.

**Continually enhance the breadth and depth of biological and environmental information held in our database** through engaging, supporting and developing volunteers skill in recording activity, building effective sharing relationships and enhancing our database with both recent and historic coverage.

**Improve and maintain effective operational standards, policies, procedures, and reporting** in accordance with National Biodiversity Network and Association of Local Environmental Records Centres guidance

## 1.2 Partnerships & Collaboration

The NBRC steering group meets three times annually to support and guide NBRC operations and strategic direction. The group comprises of representatives from the following partner organisations & groups:

Anglian Water	Moulton College
Canal & River Trust	Northamptonshire County Council
Environment Agency	Northamptonshire County Recorders
East Midlands Highways	Natural England
Forestry Commission	University of Northampton
Kelmarsh Hall	

## 1.3 NBRC Staff

In 2017, NBRC was managed by Steve Whitbread up until August 2017. Josh Hellon, Research and Monitoring Manager, Wildlife Trust BCN managed the team until Rosalind Johnston was recruited as NBRC Centre Manager in December 2017. Josh Hellon continues to oversee and provide line management for all three hosted Wildlife BCN Record Centres. Throughout 2017-18, experienced Data Officers Nathalie Hueber, James Skinner and Rachel Tate have staffed the NBRC. Regular volunteers work under the guidance of Rachel Tate. Ryan Clark joined the team as WILDside Project Coordinator in February 2017 to grow Northamptonshire's recording community.

### **Centre Manager**

*Rosalind Johnston*

### **Data Officers**

*Nathalie Hueber*

*James Skinner*

*Rachel Tate*

### **WILDside Project Coordinator**

*Ryan Clark*

### **Professional Development**

The team have all developed their survey, identification and technical skills, as well as ensuring the centre is up-to-date through attendance of regional meetings and conferences. All staff have current First Aid training.

#### Conference & Meetings

UK Moth Recorders Conference, National Forum for Biological Recorders Conference, East of England LERC Meetings, Herpetofauna Workers

Meeting, Local Wildlife Sites Panel Meeting, National Biodiversity Network Conference, Local Nature Partnership Conference.

#### Workshops

Spider Identification Workshop, Microscopy Workshop, Bee Survey & Identification Workshop and Field Identification Skills Certification (FISC)

#### Development & Training

UAV theory and practical certification, First Aid.

### **County Recorders & Volunteers**

Skilled volunteers and county recorders spend hours of their own time supporting our LERC without which we would not be able to function. Our volunteers support us through digitising historic biological records, through gathering species records over the year, through skills sharing and training for identification. Our county recorders ensure current quality species data is supplied annually for incorporation into our database - together they help us continually improve the environmental database we hold; current and historic. Through 2017-18, we were supported by three office-based volunteers, a widening volunteer recording network fuelled by our WILDside project and Northamptonshire's County Recorders. We meet with our County Recorders twice a year and organise an annual recorders BioBlitz in the summer - this year held at Horton Woods & Meadows.

# Key Achievements 2017-18

## 2.1 Data Holdings Summary

### Sites

NBRC sites datasets are updated and managed by our partners the Wildlife Trust BCN with assistance and support of NBRC staff. Staff assisted with 9 Local Wildlife Sites surveys over the summer and attended the 2017 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) selection panel meeting in Feb 2018. In 2017 37 Local Wildlife Sites went through the selection panel and had their citation either created or updated; this includes some Protected Wildflower Verge sites. We continue to improve our LWS database through data cleansing; we have now completed 655 LWS new citations out of 716 held (81.7% complete).

There were no further changes to the sites information held this year.

**Table 1 Sites information held in NBRC database (updated April 2018)**

	Number of Sites
<i>Non Statutory Sites</i>	
Local Wildlife Site	715
Potential Wildlife Site	1093
Local Geological Sites	61
Protected Wildflower Verge	31
Pocket Park	81
Wildlife Trust Reserves	44
<i>Statutory Sites</i>	
Site of Special Scientific Interest	55
National Nature Reserve	2
Local Nature Reserve	18



## Habitats

Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats have been mapped in all Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) sites in Northamptonshire and are updated as new information becomes available. This data is provided, updated, and managed by our partners the Wildlife Trust BCN.

**Table 2 Habitats information held in NBRC database (updated April 2018)**

<b>BAP habitats</b>	<b>Area (ha)</b>
Acid Grassland	165
Calcareous Grassland	263
Eutrophic Standing Water (+2ha)	19890
Floodplain Grazing Marsh	1157
Lowland Fen	140
Lowland Heathland	2.5
Lowland Meadow	691
Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland	4620
Open Mosaics	185
Purple moor grass & rush pasture	0.8
Reedbed	33
Traditional Orchards	6
Wet woodland	172
Woodpasture & Parkland	202
<b>Other Habitats</b>	
Other Open Water	157
Scrub	295
Undetermined Grassland	1032
Undetermined Woodland	4805

<b>Total BAP habitat</b>	<b>27527.3</b>
<b>Total Other habitats</b>	<b>6289</b>
<b>All habitats</b>	<b>33816.3</b>

## Species

The NBRC work with county recorders in getting full county datasets and annual updates for groups added to our database. We aim to add a new county dataset per year and maintain annual updates of all datasets held.

The NBRC hold the full county dataset for butterflies (including 2016 & 2017 records), birds (2014, 2015 & 2016 records) and full county plant dataset totalling over 450,000 records. Incorporation of these datasets into our database is part of our long-term development plan.

54 datasets were received during 2017-18, 44 of which had been processed and added by April 2018. Our database currently holds 860,000+ species of which 630,000 (+) are verified, covering 56 taxonomic groups. A net addition of 480,000+ species was achieved during the year including updates to Bryophytes (2015 and 2016 records), Macro & Micro Moths (full county dataset) and Water Bugs (full county dataset).

Table showing full county datasets currently held in our database and updated over the last few years

**Table 3 Species information held in NBRC database (updated April 2018)**

<b>Dataset</b>	<b>Current date records to in R6</b>	<b>Last time updated in Recorder 6</b>	<b>No of records</b>	<b>Planned Update</b>
Bryophytes	Dec 2016	Spring 2018	20,000+	Spring 2019
Butterflies	Dec 2015	Spring 2018	37,000+	Spring 2019
Diptera	Dec 2015	Summer 2016	19,500+	Autumn 2018
Moths	Dec 2016	Spring 2018	450,000+	Spring 2019
Water Bugs	Dec 2016	Spring 2017	8500+	Winter 2018
Plants	October 2006	October 2006	13,500	In progress
Dragonflies	November 2003	March 2004	2,500+	In progress

## 2.3 Biological Recording & Engagement

### **Website, Newsletter & Social Media**

NBRC's website, launched through Natural England funding in 2016, aims to encourage online biological recording. To support recording in 2017 new sections of our website have been added as part of the WILDside project, including our species 'look out for surveys'. In 2018, we updated our Privacy Policy and Terms of Use and ensured our online systems met new GDPR regulations.

The website is hosted by Namesco.com on a shared web server provider with Wildlife Trust BCN. The species records (and recorder details) input onto our website are stored securely on a virtual warehouse that is owned and managed by the Biological Records Centre (BRC). The website is managed by NBRC staff with ad-hoc consultant support. Website technical issues took the website offline in May/June 2017 however it has been restored and is now successfully receiving records again.

A NBRC newsletter was produced in December 2017 with recorder articles, centre updates and wider NBN and LERC news. Newsletters are produced twice annually for Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter; historic newsletters are accessible via our website. Our Social Media includes an NBRC twitter account (@\_Northants\_BRC) with 507 followers and an active WILDside project Facebook group with 150 members listed in April 2018.

### **Bioblitz 2017 – Horton Meadows & Wood**

The NBRC annual recorders Bioblitz was held over two days in July 2017 at Horton Meadows and Wood. Thirty-two attendees, including staff, volunteers and county recorders, surveyed three Local Wildlife Sites over the weekend - covering both woodland and meadow habitats.

1325 records comprising of 755 species, from 25 different taxon groups have so far been received by the NBRC from this event, with records still to be submitted from two of our county recorders. Records submitted ranged from single records for caddisflies, harvestmen and mites to 334 records for moths. Recorders Rachel Carter (county Bryophyte recorder) and Mark Powell (county Lichen recorder) were both undertaking return visits to this woodland site and submitted a summary report of their findings.



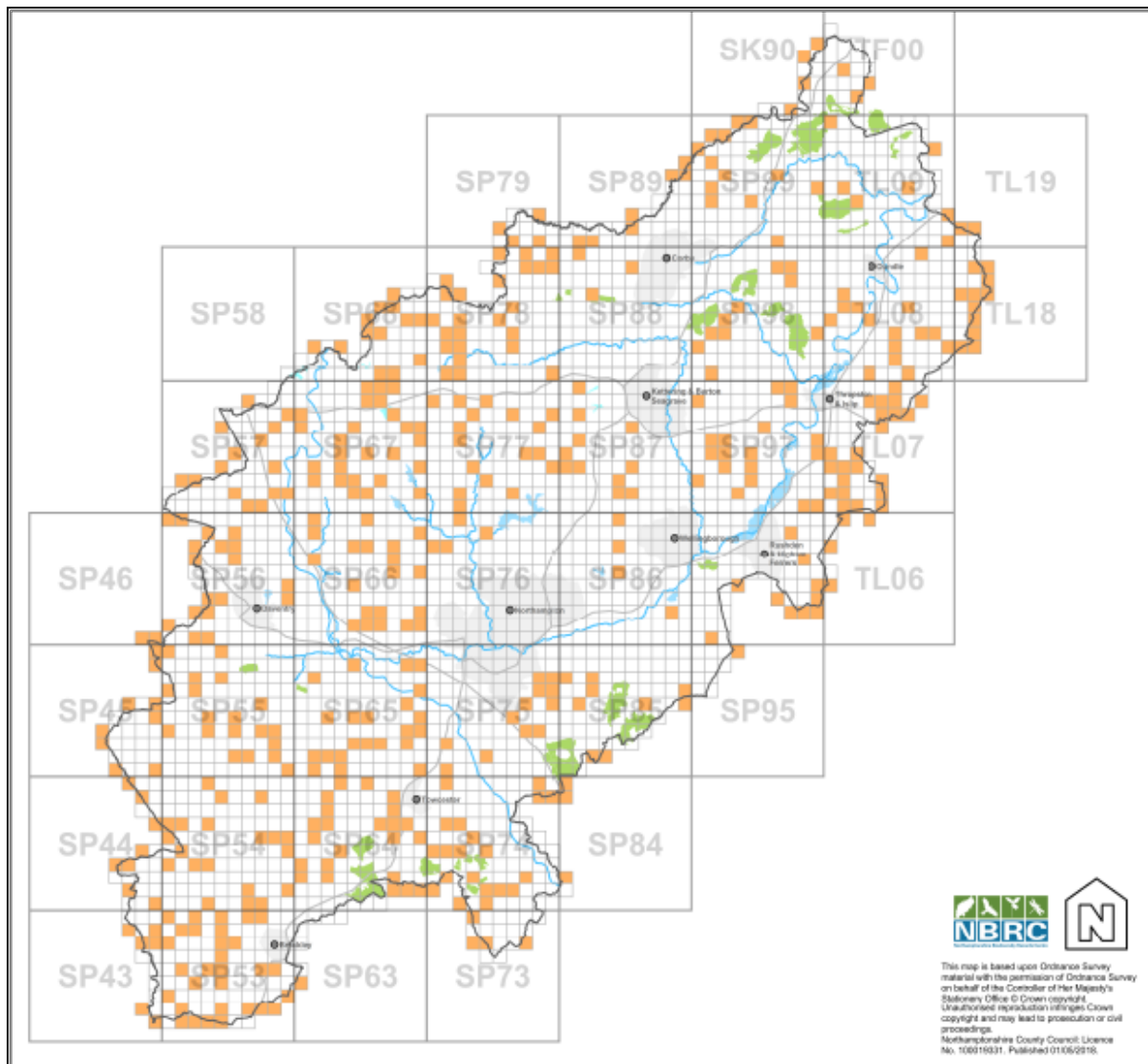
**Figure 1 Horton Meadows South, photo credit Nathalie Hueber**

A full report will be prepared for the Spring/Summer Newsletter in May 2018.

## **WILDside Project**

The Heritage Lottery Funded WILDside project was launched in early 2017 with the aim of engaging and growing recording in Northamptonshire. The project has been successful in increasing the environmental information held by the NBRC, resourcing and equipping recorders for survey and identification, as well as building the skills of a network of local volunteer recorders. Coordinated by our WILDside Project Coordinator, new audiences have already been engaged through the organisation of public BioBlitz events, identification workshops, species talks, species survey workshops and a new Facebook group.

Seasonal surveys on Mistletoe and Bee Flies has generated new species records through our website. The WILDside project is also supporting recorders to fill the 'gaps in the maps' (fig 2) to increase the depth and breadth of biological information held in Northamptonshire.



**Figure 2. Map showing recording coverage (up to April 2018). 1km squares with over 50 records are displayed in white and 1km squares with fewer than 50 records are displayed in orange across Northamptonshire County. WILDside is encouraging recording effort in the highlighted orange square for better recording coverage for the county – turning the ‘orange squares white’.**

Heritage Lottery Fund has recognised the success of this project to date, and have granted approval to run WILDside for an additional year. Through the project we intend to build skills and support for recording, and ensure the sustainability of quality recording activity in Northamptonshire.

## 2.4 Data Services

### Information Requests

NBRC data service continues to be a valuable resource for Northamptonshire, with a higher than average number of commercially requested data searches received. The pricing of this service has remained static since 2016. In 2017-18 we gained the highest income from commercial information requests to date, and ensured a turnaround time within 10 days for all paid requests.

**Table 4 Biological information service summary 2014-2018**

Financial Year	Total Data Requests	Commercial Data Requests	Data Request Ratio	Commercial Rate Per Hour (£)	Income
2014-2015	307	239	77.85%	90	£27,112.50
2015-2016	277	217	78.34%	90	£26,685.00
2016-2017	223	160	71.75%	120	£25,050.00
2017-2018	240	182	75.83%	120	£29,100.00

### Data Agreements

In 2017-18 we held Service Level Agreements for the provision of Northamptonshire species, habitat and site data provision with the Environment Agency, Thames Water, Anglian Water, and North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit.

Agreed SLAs	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Environment Agency	Agreement in place	<i>(In discussion for a new SLA covering the next 4 years)</i>	
Thames Water	Agreement in place – funds received		
Anglian Water	Agreement in place	£3,000	£3,000
North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit	Agreement in place	<i>(In discussion)</i>	

## 2.5 Organisational Development

The NBRC works collaboratively with regional Record Centres within the East of England & East Midlands. Two members of staff attended the 2018 spring meeting and engaged in discussion of best practice, joint working and IT systems development. The NBRC works to NBN and ALERC guidelines and guidance for best practice. The team are in the process of documenting and reviewing our organisational policies and practices. In 2017-18 procedure drafts were produced for: Data Enquiries, Validating Locations, NBRC Inbox, & Processing Website records. The NBRC team are in the process of reviewing and finalising these documents for 2018. We have in place a newly reviewed Data Sharing Agreement with our recorders and partner organisations. NBRC have worked with our host and data controller, Wildlife Trust BCN and followed NBN trust guidance to ensure we are compliant with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Our Privacy Policy and Terms of Use are available on our website and we plan to add documented organisational policies to our website. Our aim is to ensure the NBRC operates effectively and meets the criteria for ALERC accreditation

### **IT infrastructure**

All NBRC work is housed securely on the Wildlife Trust's Northamptonshire office server – with 2 GB of RAM available. We use the software MapInfo and Recorder 6 to generate biological reports. We are investigating options to continue to improve our IT infrastructure further over the coming year.

### **Bigger Vision & River Monitoring Project**

NBRC's Environment Agency funded Bigger Vision & River Monitoring Project aims to deliver professional aerial photography, video and habitat analysis to support river restoration and management.

Through this funding the NBRC are now equipped with a DJI Phantom 4 pro UAV drone with 20 megapixel camera capable of high definition 4k/60fps video flown up to an altitude of 400ft. Data Officers have completed training to meet CAA standards in ATTI and GPS mode, to gain full certification as licenced operators in 2018. They have full commercial insurance (up to £5 million).

The drone will be used in the delivery of agreed project funded river monitoring for the Environment Agency and longer term will develop the services of the record centre through providing aerial photography, 3D imagery, orthomosaic



mapping, video, and normalized difference vegetation index (NDVI) habitat analysis.



**Figure 3 Example orthomosaic taken at Lilbourne Meadows Nature Reserve, photo credit, Josh Hellon**



**Figure 4 Detailed high-resolution image from Phantom 4 drone taken at Lilbourne Meadows Nature Reserve, photo credit, Josh Hellon**



### 3.1 Finances 2017-18

**Table 5 Financial Summary 2017-2018**

Reserves end March 2017	£ 66,201.00
Surplus/(deficit) end of March 2018	-£ 6,813.00
<b>Projected carry forward into 2018-2019</b>	<b>£ 59,388.00</b>
<i>Contingency budget for 6 months</i>	<i>£ 30,473.00</i>
<i>Carry forward less contingency</i>	<i>£ 34,239.00</i>
Value of hosting arrangement with WT	£ 5,324.00

The NBRC overall income and expenditure in 2017/18 was higher than the prior year due to two grant funded development projects.

In late 2016, our Heritage Lottery Fund funded WILDside project began for which NBRC have committed £25,000 of match funding from the organisational reserves up to December 2019. Match funding is committed to support the purchase of a library of survey and species identification equipment and guides, as well as the training and hosting of the project coordinator. We expect further spending as part of this project in 2018/19 on equipment, training, printing and volunteers as well as the hosting of our Project Coordinator for the duration of the project.

In 2017, the NBRC received grant funding from the Environment Agency of £18,000 over the next three years to develop drone survey capabilities for river monitoring. During this initial year, from this funding, the NBRC purchased a state of the art Phantom 4 pro drone and ipad, insurance and instructed training as well as paid training time for two members of staff to qualify CAA certified UAV operators. The remaining funding will fund NBRC staff time on agreed Environment Agency funded River Monitoring project work.

The NBRC had a successful year in 2017/18 for data requests with a total income of £29,460. A new formal Service Level Agreement was formed with

North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit as a prior regular user of the data service for 2017-2019. Service Level Agreements continued, in place with the Environment Agency, Anglian Water and Thames Water. Alongside our data information service, it is also expected, that drone survey requests will be a future commercial service of the NBRC as a complimentary service to our data information requests and therefore expect an increase in our budget project work income from 2018/19 and beyond.

We experienced technical difficulties with our website in June-July 2017, requiring an unanticipated spend of £399 during 2017/18 in order to restore the site. The increased budget for website support in 2018/19 reflects planned NBRC investment, as agreed with the Steering Committee, to ensure issues are quickly identified and rectified.

The increase in salary expenditure this year includes a review of our Data Officer grade salaries to ensure they are in-line with industry standards. Recruitment costs were incurred for replacement of the NBRC Centre Manager during 2017. Additional paid staff time was funded through our Environment Agency 'Bigger Vision' grant, for staff to complete training to qualify as drone operators. In the 2018/19 budget the salary calculation includes the reviewed Data Officer salaries and an organisation-wide 2.5% salary increase.

The NBRC's agreed committed match funding of the WILDside project from NBRC reserves, as approved by our Steering Group Committee and hosts the Wildlife Trust BCN in 2016, accounts for the reported deficit of £6,813 for 2017/18. The operating expenditure of NBRC is consistent with income received and we expect this to continue in 2018/19.

**Table 6 NBRC Expenditure (April 1 2017 - 31 March 2018)**

	<i>2016/2017 Actual</i>	<i>2017/2018 Actual</i>	<i>2018/2019 Budget</i>
Staff	£ 52,348.00	£ 59,346.00	£ 56,946.00
Equipment (assets)	£ -	£ 3,138.00	£ 4,500.00
NBRC training	£ 615.00	£ 3,773.00	£ 1,400.00
NBRC travel	£ 140.00	£ 473.00	£ 1,000.00
NBRC volunteers	£ -	£ -	£ 500.00
ALERC, NBN, NFBR & GeoConservationUK membership	£ 400.00	£ 450.00	£ 510.00
IT Software and website support	£ 11.00	£ 399.00	£ 200.00
Telephone, consumables & printing	£ 190.00	£ 39.00	£ 169.00
*NBRC total annual running expenditure	£ 53,704.00	£ 58,285.00	£ 56,345.00
**WILDside committed match fund	£ 490.00	£ 9,333.00	£ 8,880.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£ 53,704.00</b>	<b>£ 67,618.00</b>	<b>£ 65,225.00</b>

**Table 7 NBRC Income (April 1 2017 - 31 March 2018)**

	<i>2016/2017 Actual</i>	<i>2017/2018 Actual</i>	<i>2018/2019 Budget</i>
Information Requests	£ 36,090.00	£ 29,460.00	£ 33,000.00
SLAs	£ 18,281.00	£ 21,231.00	£ 25,231.00
Project work	£ -	£ 10,114.00	£ 10,048.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£ 54,768.77</b>	<b>£ 60,805.00</b>	<b>£ 64,918.00</b>

## 4.1 Future Plans

Over the coming year we intend to manage the existing biological information service needs for our partners, consultants, researchers and community groups. We intend to continue to build recorder relationships through our WILDside project and develop data sharing partnerships with conservation and research organisations. Through documenting our policies and procedures, working in consultation with other LERCs and through following wider NBN and ALERC guidance we intend to strengthen our organisational governance. We aim to ensure transparency in preparation to apply for accredited LERC status during the year. We intend to continually develop our technological infrastructure and technical skill in order to ensure NBRC services to meet user needs. We intend to increase financial stability through diversifying our services including aerial mapping and supporting Biodiversity in Neighbourhood Planning. The NBRC steering group committee will continue to meet regularly in order to guide the sustainability and growth of the Centre.

Up until the end of 2020 the

**WILDside**

Project will be promoting and supporting wildlife recording across Northamptonshire

***Enthusing the next generation of wildlife recorders***

Get involved now or help support our follow up schemes.

