

Northern Ireland NBN Strategy Refresh Workshop

Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Holywood Museum, Holywood, County Down

Tuesday 21st October 2014

Introduction

The National Biodiversity Network (NBN) is refreshing its strategic direction in 2014. Drivers for this refresh include the recent changes in NBN Trust staff, technological advances for biological recording and data curation and the ever changing landscape of biodiversity activity in the UK. The current strategy, published in 2010, is now four years old so a refresh is timely. Preliminary work began on this strategy refresh over 18 months ago through two Extraordinary General Meetings (in Feb 2013 and Feb 2014) at which a draft skeleton structure for a new strategy was prepared.

The NBN Trust sought input from Network members and associates, from data providers and potential collaborators and NBN Gateway users throughout the UK via a Strategy Refresh Questionnaire. A summary of the 225 responses to this questionnaire can be found [here](#).

The NBN Trust then organised a series of workshops across the United Kingdom (in Wales, England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and with the Defra family) to gather a more country-focussed perspective of the current state of the NBN, how people would like the NBN to work within each country, and what the different partners of the NBN, including the NBN Trust, could do to achieve the strategic aims.

The objective of this engagement was to ensure as many people were listened to during the course of the Strategy refresh as possible (from the largest to the smallest recording schemes, from government agencies and non-government organisations to environmental planners and local authorities, and from universities and research institutes to ecological consultants). This overall aim was to ensure the collaborative nature of the Network was truly reflected in the strategy, that all voices were heard and that all participants had the opportunity to influence the development of the new 10 year Strategy.

Northern Ireland Workshop

The following document summarises the outcomes of the Strategy Refresh Workshop held on the 21st October 2014 in Belfast. This workshop was attended by organisations from across Northern Ireland representing national schemes and societies, NGOs, academia, government agencies, local authorities, ecological consultants and Centre for Environmental Data and Record (CEDaR), the local record centre for Northern Ireland. The workshop was hosted and organised by CEDaR staff and facilitated by NBN Trust.

Objectives for the workshops

- To provide feedback on the results from the strategy refresh questionnaire
- To highlight and discuss major issues and ensure all voices are heard
- To brainstorm ways forward for the NBN
- To detail the timeframe and process for the final stages of the refresh

This workshop also provided a forum for people to meet and network and to continue strengthening the collaborative nature of the National Biodiversity Network.

The following delegates were in attendance:

- John O'Boyle NIEA
- Iain Davies NIEA

- Mark Wright NIEA
- Andy Crory Ulster Wildlife/ERG
- Ralph Forbes BSBI/ERG
- Ruth Wilson Antrim Biodiversity Officer
- Abby McSherry Newry and Mourne Biodiversity Officer
- Lindsay Houston Newtownabbey Biodiversity Officer
- Damian McFerran CEDaR
- Fiona McCrory CEDaR
- Pauline Campbell CEDaR
- Catherine Finlay CEDaR
- Julia Nunn CEDaR
- Dr Cliff Henry National Trust
- Shaun Wolfe-Murphy WM Associates
- Emma Boston Queen's University Belfast
- Shane Wolsey BTO Northern Ireland
- John Sawyer NBN Trust
- Rachel Stroud NBN Trust

Workshop Structure

The format of the day was structured around the five proposed Strategic Aims for the NBN. These are:

a. Capturing, diversifying and enhancing wildlife data

*the UK. It includes the development and maintenance of
verification of raw biological data through survey and*

b. Making wildlife information available to those who need it

*to create wildlife information for use by educators,
c. It includes increasing the interoperability of data*

c. Captivating and engaging people about wildlife

*it is, why it is special, what it does for us. This is
recording and being involve*

d.

d. Providing the best wildlife information management

*ge and dissemination infrastructure is the best
d centres, etc.).*

e. Supporting the Network to support wildlife

*the on-going development of the NBN, its
NBN Trust.*

These aims were discussed as a collective group with a particular focus on what is currently working well and what issues and challenges exist. Priority issues that were raised were then developed into objectives which formed the basis of afternoon discussions. Workshop attendees then worked to determine what needed to be done, how it would be done (including options) and who would do the work.

The outcomes of these discussions will be used to inform the final NBN Strategy, making the Strategic Aims realistic and achievable and developing ownership of the NBN Strategy across the Network, as well as identifying areas where the NBN can have a more country focussed approach.

Workshop outcomes

Key themes which arose from this workshop were:

Relationships- there are strong relationships already established throughout Northern Ireland. How can these be maintained, and new relationships developed?

Promoting and supporting biological recording - the small but strong recording community in Northern Ireland is extremely willing. How can the NBN help support this and provide clearer direction?

NI NBN Interface - a NI NBN interface would be of significant benefit to the Northern Ireland recording community

Diversifying data holding - There is currently a distinct deficit in habitat data holdings - how can we change this? There are gaps in the data holdings which need to be plugged

International Data - How can we build better relationships internationally, especially with regards to sharing data with RoI?

Data flows - How can we map, simplify and improve the current data flows within NI?

Identification of current issues in Northern Ireland

a. Capturing, diversifying and enhancing wildlife data

Key themes

- **Size of recording community**
- **Data handling/capture**
- **Data gaps**
- **Diversifying and enhancing**

The recent improvements to the CEDaR website have been great, and the technical support that CEDaR offers is highly regarded. As new technology emerges it is recognised that this brings excellent opportunities, especially for new recorders, and this should be encouraged and resourced. Northern Ireland has a brilliant network of very talented recorders who have worked together to be productive and provide a fabulous resource.

However, it was identified that there are still areas which need improving. There needs to be clarification and simplification of the complex data flows within Northern Ireland which can lead to inefficient or double handling. The development of a NI bespoke recording app would help support the growing recording community in Northern Ireland. Clarification around the relationship between CEDaR and NBN is required as currently many feel that the NBN is at arm's length as they only work with CEDaR and have limited involvement with the NBN.

There is a requirement to diversify and enhance the data holdings for Northern Ireland and start to identify and fill data gaps. This will involve identifying who holds data which is not currently accessible. There is very

little habitat data accessible through the NBN Gateway. Most species data on the NBN Gateway is present/absence frequency data, and while this is valuable it is not as useful as abundance data. Additional data which would add value to the current data holdings included 'admin type data' such as Tree preservation orders and SCNCI boundaries and data, and fine resolution data (i.e. accurate to <1m) which is being captured but often the fine detail is being lost. There is a requirement for guidance on how to capture spurious grid reference accuracy for historic records which may only have vague site names or locations rather than an accurate grid reference. It is also important that surveillance data and data for reporting is available as currently these data holdings are often incomplete

Of the four themes that arose from these discussions, many of these issues and topics were cross cutting across the other strategic aims, such as data gaps and diversifying and enhancing data.

b. Making wildlife information available to those who need it

Key themes:

- **Data entry**
- **Habitat data provision**
- **International data**
- **Data charging**
- **Analysis and interpretation**
- **Any unknowns in data**
- **Data flows.**

There are some good data entry systems within Northern Ireland and CEDaR is really valuable for checking geographical distribution of species, and admin type boundaries linked to NBN is great for querying data within a focused area. However, data flows are slow and unclear and it can often be complicated to know the best place to enter data to ensure that it travels to the appropriate places via the most efficient route and does not get stuck in a 'black hole'. There were also concerns about data charging, namely being charged to access data, even if it is your own (BTO).

A key theme which arose was international data and the need to share and work closely with Republic of Ireland to create an 'all Ireland' picture of species distribution. Additionally being able to see distributions within the context of a wider geographic area, for example within the context of Europe would significantly add value to the data.

There are improvements which would be implemented within the NBN Gateway which would make the Gateway more efficient and useful. There is little habitat data on the NBN Gateway at the present, and this is essential for making the most of the data holdings. It is not easy to use the NBN and clearly see the 'unknowns in data', for example knowing if data is hidden - even if it is not available. It is difficult to analysis and interpret the data on the NBN Gateway, and to download and map outside of the Gateway as it needs to be transformed and edited. There is a requirement to map and overlay species and habitat data with other information. There is potential for the NBN Gateway to be used as a government tool, e.g., for planning decisions as it is currently totally under-utilised within Northern Ireland for this use.

c. Captivating and engaging people about wildlife

Key Themes

- **Supporting and developing confidence**

- **Development**
- **New Blood.**

It was suggested that this strategic aim is too broad but that it should perhaps be changed to “Captivating and engaging people about recording wildlife and the value of wildlife data”. This would narrow the focus for the aim to where NBN can add greatest value.

There is an enthusiasm from Northern Ireland records to record and they could become much more efficient with more encouragement. CEDaR is now a well established partner for a variety of individuals and groups, and increasing the relationships with NBN could facilitate further this role.

Getting back a personal thank you for a record is important. NBDC responds to each record with an email referring to linked work, and this should be developed in other data entry systems. There is a requirement to develop a verifier network for under recorder groups, and to support the established verifiers within Northern Ireland.

One of the most important areas discussed under this Strategic Aim was the problem of encouraging new recorders to take up biological recording. Within the Northern Ireland recording community everyone knows each other and there is the danger that for new people joining the community this can be somewhat overwhelming, especially given how much there is to learn when starting any form of biological recording. Social media, new technologies such as camera phones and fun ways to learn new skills are required to engage a new generation of people who will learn to record. A new approach for the NBN could be to captivate people into recording, via increased public engagement.

d. Providing the best wildlife information management

Key themes

- **Technical support**
- **Gateway and other portals**
- **Services.**

There were concerns that this Strategic Aim is unclear.

CEDaR is trusted as a data custodian and as a result there are good relationships between the recorders in Northern Ireland resulting in a good range of data available through CEDaR. There is positive energy around working with the NBN, especially given the new NBN strategy refresh as it is recognised that the old Strategy is outdated.

The NBN can support recording in Northern Ireland via extension of standards and tools for processing data. Each record should have a unique legacy code field identifying source of that information to enable interoperability. The concept of a Northern Ireland bespoke NBN interface developed with CEDaR was well received, and if this could include web ‘feature’ services to exchange polygon layers this would be a valuable addition. There was concern that support for Marine Recorder and Recorder6 is being lost.

e. Supporting the Network to support wildlife

Key themes

- **Networking**

- **International**
- **Training**
- **Young recorders.**

The compact size of the recording community within Northern Ireland results in excellent networking and there is support for further networking events, including training events to be held both internally within Northern Ireland and also with the Republic of Ireland to improve all-Ireland data sharing, and build relationships. There is scope for promoting recording within younger generations, via schemes such as EcoSchools.

Objectives for Northern Ireland

The following objectives were identified for further discussion with a focus on developing strategies to achieve them.

- New blood and the use of technology
- Data flow and networking
- Habitats data provision
- Analysis and interpretation
- International data/relationships
- Supporting and developing confidence.

For each of these objectives breakout groups were asked to identify:

- What needs to be done?
- How will it be done? What are the options?
- Who should take the lead (and who should be involved)?

The outcomes of these discussions are summarised below.

New Blood and the use of technology

Objective:

- To encourage greater participation in recording with an emphasis on the use of new technology and on young people, build recording capacity and provide a fresh image – move away from 'Nerdy'.

To encourage "new blood" into the recording community it was identified that areas to focus on include assessing the gaps in order to diversify the pool of recorders, improve communication, celebrate success and support new recorders.

A potential barrier to people becoming involved is the feeling that it is not possible to connect with the public organisations carrying out the work. A 'pop up hub' that travelled around the country may be more welcoming to encourage new recorders to feel that they can approach the organisations to get involved.

Encouraging environment officers or wildlife ambassadors in groups such as EcoSchools, Scouts, walking clubs, outdoor activity groups, Duke of Edinburgh award, Forest service rangers, park rangers, countryside access staff, U3A as may foster new biological recorders. A challenge which will significantly help to promote biological recording is to develop wildlife recording, including identification into the national curriculum.

Improving communication via the NI biodiversity portal website, promoting wildlife sites and organisations, developing a Northern Ireland quarterly recorder newsletter, contributing article to group newsletters and ensuring a single message about recording and how to become involved is being delivered will all help promoting the value and biological recording across Northern Ireland.

Celebrating success via natural language generation to thank and inform recorders, developing achievement schemes (scout badges, eco-school awards, Duke of Edinburgh achievements in biodiversity and recording, Youth recorder of the year award, CEDaR recording badges, etc. etc.) will help promote recording to younger generations, a garden BioBlitz scheme and geocaching with a biodiversity purpose could all encourage people to become involved in recording.

Once new recorders are interested it is imperative that they are supported. This may be recommending the correct resources and books for different levels (beginning, novice, etc.), provision of training (ID, methodology, etc. etc.) giving confidence for both recorders and recording schemes, providing forums and networking opportunities for sharing knowledge and asking for assistance, use of social media such as iSpot as a tool for enhancing skills, communication and linking with experts and using new technologies to encourage recorders (mobile sites, smartphone apps).

Question to follow up: Wildtrackers badge scheme – where does the data go?

Data Flow and networking

Objectives:

- To improve understanding of how data will flow between CEDaR, NBN, NSS and improve relationships between partners
- To identify who is responsible for data flow steps
- To enable real time data availability – data flow back to recorder, as well as from recorder
- To clarify the different data management requirements around survey data holdings vs adhoc data holdings .

This discussion was around data flow in context of networking to understand the data flow and how to improve.

What needs to be done?

Need to know the the current position, where data is and where it goes. There are a huge number of partners involved (user and provider of records) and there are no clear methods of data flow through NI into International. In additional to this, it is important to look at all levels (local, national and international). It is important to agree best practise with all partners as to what the data flow should be, and there should be some overarching global rules in data flows (NBN lead?) which would allow a framework to be published. If there is clarity, this will build relationships, trust, quality and quantity of data.

How can this be done? What would we do if we got this framework and best practise?

Development of a data flow tool to tell people what will happen to their data if they make certain choices. This could be in the form of an app to advise people to submit a record. A data tracker would enable feedback and let data providers see, via a unique ID on their record, where there record was in the system. This would let people see where the blockages are, and the speed of data through the system. It is

important to ensure that flexibility is in the system as data flows may change over time which may restrict this tool.

Additional suggestions included data flow agreements – between NSS and CEDaR, would this help make data flows less complicated as people would sign up and commit to process. Alternatively making the terms and conditions more open would allow data to flow through the system

Who would lead

NBN should create the backbone as this could be applicable nationally, and modified and implemented locally.

Data flows will improve with increased clarity as to what the NBN is and the role of the NBN.

International and relationships

Objective:

- To integrate data at all scales across transnational boundaries and to focus on biodiversity boundaries (not political) and to maintain and nurture relations.

Biodiversity does not follow political boundaries and therefore it is important to build strong relationships internationally to conserve species. All recorders need to know their data is flowing – going into decision making, consultations, etc.. Could feed data from multiple sources to create one central place for Britain and Ireland. There is a demand in NI for a central portal with CEDaR, NBN, NBDC and a joint meeting with CEDaR, NBN, NBDC to discuss this further is required. BSBI, BTO, Butterfly Conservation – all working well cross borders. Change name from National Biodiversity Network to 'Biodiversity Network', though perhaps the word 'Biodiversity' may be the reason why some people do not engage as it is potentially seen as academic and elitist??

What need to be done

1. Identify the scales of relationships and roles, and the boundaries (biogeographical rather than political). This will have implication on funding.
 - a. Ireland (NI and RoI),
 - b. Britain and Ireland (recording groups and societies),
 - c. UK (reporting level),
 - d. Europe (level of reporting e.g. Article 17 species, etc.),
 - e. World Level (GBIF)
2. Developing partners with datasets and clarifying roles and responsibilities, with regards of exchange of data and who would holds the top copy, etc.? The end user of the data does not need to know who is in charge but there needs to be a clear system to avoid people duplicating data entry.

How will this be done?

1. Joined up thinking, proactive actions (events, conferences)
2. Need to look at investment in technology – so many apps, databases, etc. that it makes it more complicated – feeds into data flows.
3. Needs more local, national and international projects. Especially linking NI and RoI
4. Funding sources (InterReg) – we were doing things before there was funding! Funding not always the obstacle

5. Importance of feedback – critical to working together.

Leads

- NBN Trust to have discussion with NBDC
- NI feeding records into NBN
- Development of data flow agreements with local recorders to clarify how data gets to Gateway, Waterford, Moths Ireland, etc..

Supporting and developing confidence

Objectives:

- To provide feedback, training and mentoring to recorders
- To train the trainers
- To educate people about and demonstrate end uses for data.

It is important to understand motivation behind recording – why would someone join? Career advancement, community, competitive, conservation – if understand the motivation this will oversee the rest of the supporting. This could be coordinated and delivered by NBN Trust, though bringing in experience from all member organisations.

Suggested ideas to help support and develop confidence in recording including a NBN online information hub to help people find training opportunities, mentors, links to websites and organisations, etc. A NBN portfolio of training workshops for organisations covering best practices on feedback to recorders, fundraising, motivation, verification, identification, etc. would help organisations deliver a common message to find and support recorders. Replicating best practice from NBN members. Each year members have strengths and weaknesses and sharing these experiences will help support others in improving. This could be funded by a joint bid from the NBN alongside it's partners (members) and to a large funder and say 'we are a partnership of 100 organisations and we all want to be able to deliver training, etc.'

Habitats data provision

Objectives:

- To record habitats / ecosystems, develop standards and remote sensing spatial layers
- To add value to existing (species) data holdings.

What needs to be done?

Need to undertake a scoping exercise to understand

- What there is currently available. Data held in multiple different datasets (NVC, Phase 1, etc.)
- What is currently being recorded
- What is needed? Who are the end users and what are their needs and priorities
- Identify how the data are used
- Identify what remote sensing is available and their accuracy
- Identify overlap between different classifications
- Look at technical issues such as habitat definitions, best practice, what is available
- prioritise what is available
- Options to create a NI habitat data layer
 - Resurvey (agree habitat definitions)

- Prioritise what is currently available and map
- Merge data.

How

- Pay for scoping exercise

Who will lead?

Coordinated by CEDaR? Or led by Government (??) as it needs to be repeatable (objective rulebases) and level of funding required. Partners, stakeholders, dataset users, dataset creators all need to be involved

Analysis and interpretation

Objectives:

- To map data and to add additional layers (such as geology, climate, et.c) and standardise data to allow analysis of change
- To provide user friendly interpretation of data

Many of the suggestions involve the Habitas redevelopment project which aims at creating a NI specific interface for accessing biodiversity data. This is to be led by CEDaR with involvement from all biological recorders, and biodiversity data users in Northern Ireland to make a user friendly portal.

) - need to audit what we currently have, and identify what data is useful for. This could be completed using a questionnaire to find out what datasets are useful to users. It is important to establish and maintain relations with relevant bodies who may hold data e.g., NT, UW, GSNI, LPS, DARD, DoE (NIEA). Following identification of required layers contact would need to be mad with relevant bodies to set up data sharing agreements. A prioritisation exercise would need to be completed to digitise and make available these data. A local data hub for NI (NBN Habitas interface) would enable these layers to be access and shared. For large datasets – signposting out to other bodies for access to these datasets may be required. This would be led by CEDaR and partners with the support of the NBN Trust.

-The current CEDaR interface quite static, but new interface would enable people to build up layers and analysis data on the portal. Given the wide range of users and the specific requirements they have, the development of a interface with specific areas for government, planners, general public, research and universities would be necessary. A toolbox of analysis and interpretation tools would ensure that key users could access, and bring together the data they require in the format more suitable to them. This would be led by CEDaR, with NBN support, bringing in partnerships.

CEDaR has vast quantity of historic data (c, survey data, monitoring data) which needs to be digitised and made available. These datasets need to be transferred into new standardised recording forms which will allow for filtering on quality, attributes, etc. This would be led by CEDaR with partners. In addition to historical data, it is important to focus on present data capture, including the creation of standardised recording cords via the CEDaR online recording. This would be led by CEDaR with input from NI recorders.