Notes from SBIF Inaugural Workshop, Battleby, 25 May 2012

Key issues identified by workshops:

Data collection (Facilitator: Craig Macadam)

- Taxonomic expertise
- Recruitment/retention of volunteers; inclusivity
- Localism
- Resourcing: status quo not acceptable or sustainable

Data management   (Facilitator: Alexa Tweddle)

(NB: primarily considered species data)

- Findings largely echoed those of SurveyMonkey questionnaire:
- Resourcing; short-termism
- Data management software & compatibility
- Data quality: lack of local experts; lack of clear mechanisms for verification
- Fragmented approaches & lack of consistent standards/formats

Data sharing   (Facilitator: Paula Lightfoot)

- **SBIF website** (role for SE web?): case studies & statistics to demonstrate the value of sharing biodiversity data; explain acronyms; explain data-sharing pathways; host online recording portal (iRecord); Metadata discovery portal to prioritise digitisation; scheme similar to Herbaria@home for mobilising legacy data; links to tools and standards about data sharing to avoid 'reinventing the wheel'.
- **Gaps in data sharing**: target academia; target consultancies. Scope for Scottish Government to enforce data sharing by developers – incorporate requirement into legislation?
- **Resourcing**: SNH should share its own data via iRecord; Scottish Government should fund development of verification rules for NBN Record Cleaner and iRecord (Defra has spent £100 K); Continuity of staffing in the organisations that support biological recording by volunteers is vital.

Data use   (Facilitator: Malcolm Muir)

- Target uses & users of data in key policy areas: agri-environment sector; marine & fisheries; development planning.
- Good quality habitat information (spatial & qualitative)
- Converting data into information

Some points from discussion:

Marine Spatial Planning will become increasingly important; Shetland already has such a plan.

Useful to formally define user group needs.

Most recorders are also data users.

Need to prioritise policy v. tactical uses of data & biodiversity indicators to assess effects of policies.

Many local authorities do not use biodiversity data, despite requirement of Biodiversity Duty.

The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy is being refreshed and a public consultation will take place over the summer.

Planning policy (development planning) is a very important use of data.

Process & existing initiatives

Difference between SBIF & BRISC: SBIF has Scottish Government backing; BRISC raised issues, but cannot provide coordinated approach.

NBN has strong focus on sharing & use of data, with much experience of data protection & confidentiality.

Presentation by Janet Imlach had highlighted structural differences between Wales & Scotland: in Wales priority is given to role of all-Wales LRC network, while in Scotland NBN & iRecord are more important, and LRC coverage is patchy.

NBN is the only national player, but scope for a series of regional recording hubs covering Scotland, instead of LRCs?

iRecord is a tool that does not replace LRCs or recording schemes.

UKBRAG has developed portal for taxonomic guidance, led by Natural History Museum. Role for National Museums Scotland to provide voucher specimen service, working in conjunction with NHM and Royal Botanic Gardens at Edinburgh & Kew?

SBIF should not reinvent wheels

SBIF should deter reinventions of wheels & duplication of effort by others.

Recording community is ageing – needs rejuvenation & encouragement. New technologies can help do this.

Establishment of a Forum

There was overwhelming majority agreement that a Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum should be formed.

Volunteers/nominees to SBIF Steering Group:

Craig	Macadam	BRISC
Chris	Cathrine	Caledonian Conservation Ltd
Dan	Haffey	CEH
Joanne	Porter	MASTS (also HWU & Linnaean Society)
Geoff/ Paula	Johnson/ Lightfoot	NBN
Nick	Fraser	NMS (or a RBGE representative)
Gareth	Heavisides	Scottish Government
Scot	Mathieson	SEPA/SE web
Iain	MacGowan	SNH
Malcolm	Muir	South Lanarkshire Council/ CoSLA
John	MacFarlane	TCV
Graeme	Wilson	TWIC

Several other potential representatives were also suggested; however Steering Group members are representing *sectors* rather than their individual organisations. All members of the data community will have a role to play in SBIF.

The Steering Group should hold its first meeting by late July – SNH offered to organise this. The Steering Group should elect a Chair, and discuss an appropriate period for members to serve. The Steering Group should arrive at a tender process to invite bids for the role of SBIF Coordinator; any members whose organisations intend to tender will need to declare an interest and absent themselves from the relevant discussion. The Steering Group should discuss the appropriate geographical scale (marine coverage), informed by MASTS/MEDIN, etc.)

There is a danger of SBIF taking on too much (as seems to have happened in Wales); the Steering Group may initially prioritise a limited number of achievable targets.

The Steering Group should produce updates for distribution to SBIF members and other interested parties. There should be a meeting of the Forum in ~1 year to review progress.

Acronyms & abbreviations and weblinks

ALERC	Association of Local Environmental Records Centres
BES	British Ecological Society
BIS	Biodiversity Information Service for Powys and Brecon Beacons National Park
BRISC	Biological Recording in Scotland
BTO	British Trust for Ornithology
CAMERAS	Coordinated Agenda for Marine, Environment and Rural Affairs Science
CEH	Centre for Ecology & Hydrology
CoSLA	Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Defra	UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
HWU	Heriot Watt University
IEEM	Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management
iRecord	Indicia-based online recording system
JNCC	Joint Nature Conservation Committee
LINK	Scottish Environment LINK
LRC	Local Records Centre
MASTS	Marine Alliance for Science & Technology for Scotland
MEDIN	Marine Environmental Data and Information Network
NBN	National Biodiversity Network
NHM	The Natural History Museum
NMS	National Museums Scotland
OPAL	Open Air Laboratories
RBGE	Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh
RESAS	Scottish Government Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services Division
SBIF	Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum
SE web	Scotland's Environment website
SEPA	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
SNH	Scottish Natural Heritage
SoB	Society of Biology
TCV	The Conservation Volunteers (formerly BTCV)
TWIC	The Wildlife Information Centre for the Lothians and Borders
UKBRAG	UK Biodiversity Research Advisory Group

WEISG   Wales Environmental Information Steering Group