

Report from the Captivating & Engaging People - Working Group June 2017

BACKGROUND

The terms NBN Trust, Atlas and unified NBN network are used here to separate out the various parts of the whole NBN.

This working group was set up in 2016 in response to the NBN Strategy Review of 2015 to take forward this part of its priorities.

The group consists of:

Janice Ansine (JA) – iSpot / Open University

Mandy Henshall (MH) – NBN Secretariat

Maria Longley (ML) / Mandy Rudd- GiGL

Matt Postles (MP) – Bristol Natural History Consortium

Graham Walley (GW) – NFBR (Co-lead of the Group and Chair of the meeting)

Sue Townsend (ST) – Field Studies Council

Laurence Evans – OPAL

Sarah Philips - KEW

Steve Whitbread - Northants BRC

To date the group has met twice and organised one NBN Conference Workshop.

Meeting 1 was the 9th August 2016 at the GiGL offices which discussed and agreed the draft Terms of Reference, followed by a wide-ranging discussion on the broad nature of the remit, 'captivating and engaging'.

The workshop on captivating and engaging took place at the 2016 NBN Conference on the 17th November in Edinburgh, where the various main audiences for biological recording were discussed and reported on, which contributed to understanding the issues in what is potentially a huge subject.

Meeting 2 was on the 22nd February 2017 at the Natural History Museum where discussions centred on priorities for action.

In addition, the group has positively affected some changes to the UK Awards for biological recording and information sharing, meaning that the five shortlisted nominees from each category will be announced.

SUGGESTED PRIORITIES

These are:

1. Raise the profile of recording

Recording and its importance needs to be better known, to the general public, politicians, journalists as well as the many providers and users of those records. This is a local and national issue, which could be taken on by the whole unified recording network, each part or member at their appropriate level. Members to be encouraged to recognise and advertise their dependence on accurate field

observations. There are good examples of groups already providing journals and other media with recording stories. Raising the profile of recording will provide reinforcement to recorders that their work is worthwhile and valued.

2. Have a recording system that we can promote, and which has a consistent voice

If we're inviting individuals to join the recording world the whole system needs to work, long-standing blocks need to be resolved and the technology should work, and be based on proper consultation with recorders and users. We should all be able to 'sell' it, publicise the way it works, explain what happens to records, why they are important, why some may be more important.

3. We need the NBN Atlas to engage recorders and deliver what they want

The NBN Atlas is a cornerstone of recording, and it should be tailored to the needs of recorders as well as data users. This priority needs to link with the work of the Data-flow working group. Recorders should be fully aware of the Atlas services and be advocates of them. We need to turn sceptics into enthusiasts.

4. Engage the interested (students, NSS – those on their way to be recorders)

Recording is an individual and uncommon interest, so those with that aptitude should be encouraged to deepen and widen it, through technology, better keys and guidebooks, through better access to courses and mentoring and by valuing that mindset and dedication. It makes sense to build on existing foundations.

5. Engage local government – e.g. local State of Nature reports

Local government has a special responsibility to know their local environment and should be key in supporting recording and the use of records. All national information has a local origin, species and habitats thrive or decline on a hedge by hedge, field by field basis. Local recorders are near their local action so need to be linked in to local decision making, and the national context. Local people and local government need to know what is special about their area, what is increasing or declining. The Atlas could help this process.

6. Engage the education sector and get biological recording onto the National Curriculum

Knowledge about the plants and animals of the UK is part of all our heritage, and deserves to be on the national curriculum, including the importance of recording to the biological sciences. This is a long-term goal, but some individual teachers and schools are already encouraging practical field skills as a way of understanding the local environment. Their work deserves to be recognised and encouraged to spread, with perhaps a special award or reward. The history and natural history of an area largely defines it, and should be a key part of all education. The next generation of citizens can only value what they know.

7. Have the right tools and show how to use them

New technologies and applications are being created or used in new ways all the time so we need to watch for those that help recording and learning about the natural world, and then share that information. Good current examples are the TomBio multi-access keys being developed by the FSC, which could perhaps be expanded by more support from the unified NBN network. DNA id kits are examples of the new technologies offering recorders new methods of recording.

8. Encourage recording as life-long learning – for old and young.

Establish a place for recording in life-long learning, as a mental discipline with a wider environmental and heritage purpose. Encourage best practice of regular peer review of identification skills throughout the learning pathway, promote the need for accuracy, depth of data and use of data for environmental management and appreciation.

FUTURE OPTIONS

These options have not yet had the benefit of discussion within the Captivating and Engaging working group.

Option 1: the working group could end with the current list of suggested priorities as its final product.

Option 2: the working group could spend another meeting to refine or expand those suggested priorities, perhaps with help from a few new members to widen the available experience, for the priorities to be actioned at a later date.

Option 3: extend option 2 with further and wider consultations through the NBN forum, to widen the ownership and get more ideas, and maybe interest to follow them up.

Option 4: the suggested priorities could be the basis for individual projects to develop policies and actions to be adopted by the NBN Trust and the wider NBN unified network, each project led by a small working group. This would need help from individuals beyond the Captivating and Engaging group. The work required for each priority would vary.

For example, it would be comparatively easy for the Priority 1 group, 'promoting recording', to ask members of the unified NBN to agree to raise the profile of recording within their organisation and in their publicity and media contacts. In contrast, to develop Priority 6, 'the National Curriculum', could require a concerted effort over time with 'big hitters' such as the Royal Biological Society or the Linnean Society, and could involve political engagement or lobbying.

Funding may be required to cover meetings, travel costs, reports and publicity. Each project would need to be project-planned from scoping to action plans, execution, review and any continuing development and monitoring. Some projects may be suitable for external funding bids, and some might be taken on by NBN members or a consortium of them.

Finally, it might also be considered whether the Captivating and Engaging Working Group should be retained, maybe to be reactivated on an ad hoc basis, if its members are willing, as they already have the experience of discussing the subject.

ACTION: Trustees are asked to give their thoughts on the suggested priorities and future options as a means for moving the work forward.

I'd like to thank the current members, and Mandy especially, for their time and contributions towards this important aspect of the work of the NBN.

*Graham Walley, NFBR Chairman, joint lead of the Captivating and Engaging Working Group
June 2017*