

# An Atlas for All

## Is the NBN Atlas supporting different uses and different users?

Tom Webb, Workshop Lead

We started by identifying different general uses, and specific user groups, of the NBN Atlas. Principle uses included for basic biodiversity research, records centres, recording schemes, public engagement, and as an evidence base for decision making. We identified a wide range of user groups: LERCs, local and national recording schemes, public engagement organisations, conservation NGOs, academic researchers, amateur naturalists, the interested public, public sector organisations and local authorities, consultancies, conservation charities and volunteers, educators (school, universities), landowners (e.g. nature reserve owners, farmers), and the media. The point was raised that this list may be too long - the NBN atlas is *not* the most appropriate tool for all of these users, and we should focus more on what we are best at. For instance, we are not best suited to be a planning resource. Trying to be all things to all people is likely to cause confusion and to dilute what we are actually best at.

Working in small groups, we identified a range of areas where development is needed. Several of these were centred on issues of licensing, access control, and potentially introducing a paywall for commercial use or a data search premium for planning application fees. The firm position of the Trust is that all data in the Atlas should be openly available with no access controls, however it is important to recognise that this issue is still one of high concern for members and that more examples of the benefits of openly accessible data may help to alleviate this. More generally, the ideal would be for funding models which allow all data to be open without compromising the business model of an individual organisation. This point about access controls also relates back to the point made above about the Atlas *not* being the best tool for all jobs - focusing on the big picture with fully open data may allow us to better define our own niche. Ellen Wilson and Jo Judge will take this forward in defining more clearly what the Atlas *can* and *can't* do, and what its best uses are.

Other areas for development included developing the Atlas as a tool for public awareness and promotion. In particular, how can we interpret NBN data in such a way that it feeds in to existing public engagement pathways - our job should be to provide the raw materials in a format that public engagement professionals can then develop into resources. A role for the NBN here may be in training the public engagement professionals in how to tell effective stories with NBN data. Especially if we allow unverified records to be visible on the Atlas, public engagement professionals would need to know what these mean, and how to remove them (or at least, to ensure they do not build stories around 'obvious' errors). They would also need to fully understand how sensitive species are dealt with, for example. Currently the public do not use the Atlas much, and may not know what they are looking for on it. While this could certainly be developed, the question is should this be a priority? (Again, feeding back into the points about the purpose and principle uses of the Atlas.) The NBN might be able to play a strong advocacy role here though and generate good publicity, potentially

recruiting new recorders by casting the net wider. Given that the best stories are often local stories, the issue of access to high resolution local data is also relevant here - but we risk running in to commercial use issues in some cases. Matt Postles agreed to provide a short summary of what he and other public engagement professionals need in order to be able to tell effective stories.

A final priority area was getting data from academics and other researchers, especially from their publicly funded research - for example, lots of data sits in the grey academic literature (BSc, MSc and PhD theses). We could liaise with funders and publishers to ensure that occurrence data (e.g. from fieldwork) is appropriately deposited as a condition of funding and/or publication, and that organisms are correctly identified. The NBN could play a role here in lobbying funders and/or publicity - one option would be to provide a short standard statement that could be included into the Data Management Plans now required by NERC, for example. Another idea might be to create affiliations between specific universities and the NBN. The Consultants Portal might serve as an example of what does (and doesn't) work well when trying to engage a new community and encourage them to support the Atlas. Ellen Wilson agreed to explore these options further with Jo Judge, with support from Tom Webb.