

**Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum - 19<sup>th</sup> Advisory Group Meeting Notes**  
**Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2021**  
**14:00 – 16:30**

**Invited:** Gill Dowse (SWT); Wilma Harper (NBN Trust/ TWIC); Debs Muscat (ALERC); Jo Porter (Heriot Watt); Glenn Roberts (NESBREc); David Roy (BRC); Iain Sime (NS); Rona Sinclair (NS); Ellen Wilson (RSPB); Jonathan Willet (SWT/ SBIF), Nick Fraser (NMS), Lisa Chilton (NBNT), Chris McInerny (BRSIC) and Scot Mathieson (SEPA).

**Substitute Attendee:** Andy Davis, Conservation Officer (CNPA)

**Apologies:** Guy Harewood (Stirling Council); Andy Ford (CNPA), Claire Lacey (CIEEM), Craig Macadam (Buglife), Elaine Anderson (CIEEM),

## **AGENDA**

### **1) Welcome and minutes and matters arising from the last meeting [EW]**

EW welcomed the new attendees. Lisa Chilton NBN Trust CEO, she has been in post for 9 weeks. Chris McInerny the BRISC Chairman is very involved with the Glasgow Natural History Society and all things herpetological. Scot Mathieson has returned after the SEPA cyber attack and commented that they still aren't able to access their own biological data but are rebuilding access to it.

The minutes of the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 2021 were approved.

### **2) Action Points from the last meeting [EW]**

- *All previous action points were discharged.*

### **3) Co-chairing of the SBIF AG [EW]**

EW proposed to the group that she would like to co-chair the SBIF AG with GD due to pressures on her time. The co-chairing would allow greater flexibility for meeting dates, particularly as some key meetings are coming up. There were no objections at the meeting.

**AP AG19-01.** *JW to update the SBIF webpages with new co-chairing arrangement.*

### **4) Better Biodiversity Data Project Development [IS, EW, GD, LC]**

GD spoke to her PowerPoint presentation and explained the objectives of the project, its interaction with the LERC, Scottish and UK levels of biological data management and the staffing structure and phasing. The staffing structure diagram was incorrect and this was amended during the meeting and re-circulated to the attendees.

#### **Funding (IS).**

Funding was agreed in principle for the original 2-year project in late-March. The funding would have been from NatureScot and the Scottish Government. The pause in the project has not affected the offer in principle but a new host organisation will need to submit a new budget for approval. Since March there have been discussions within NatureScot about managing their own data and also the management of wider environmental data held by public bodies. There is lots going on.

#### **Hosting (GD).**

The Scottish Wildlife Trust has hosted the Development Officer since 2018 and it was seen as a possible host for the BBD project. After much consideration by the Senior Management Team the Trust decided not to host the

project. External projects are still hosted by the Trust but they haven't always delivered for the Trust in terms of what they got back from the projects. With this in mind and the risks identified in the BBD proposal the Senior management Team's decision was that there would be a host who was a better "fit" for the project and a more natural home for the Hub post-project they decided to be supportive but not to host the project.

EW – RSPB did consider offering to host the project, but again it was felt there were hosts out there who were a better "fit".

LC – Lisa has met with the SBIF Management Group on two occasions these meetings led to a proposal to host the BBD Project submitted to the NBN Trust Board asking for an approval in principle to do this subject to successfully spending the next few months providing answers and reassurances to the board's questions regarding funding and finance and to confirm themselves that the BBD Proposal is fit for purpose. During this time there will be liaison with NatureScot and Scottish Government regarding the funding offer and arrangements.

A second key aspect was governance. Hosting is an ambiguous term and the board was keen to see how exactly the BBD Project would fit in with the NBN Trust. Clear lines of communication and responsibility are required to manage any risk.

Once these issues have been addressed a paper for formal approval of hosting the BBD Project will be submitted to the NBN Trust Board in early September.

### **Comments**

WH – A key question is how decisions are made, the NBNT Board have many questions to be answered. They need to be fully aware of what it is being asked to commit to.

GR – Were other hosts considered. Such as NatureScot?

IS – Yes, this was discussed but the barriers were the BBD entity being independent of Government to allow it to advocate for the recording community.

GD – If SBIF became part of Government then it might turn off some of the community with engaging with SBIF as they may have seen its independence being lost. The NBN Trust was seen as being a natural home for the project.

DR – Dataflows, how do National Schemes and Societies fit in with the BBD Project?

### **General Questions.**

EW – Taxonomic and geographical (biological) data gathering and management need to work well together and this is a key aspect of what the BBD hopes to be able to improve.

JP – What about the Orkney Wildlife Information Center? There has been a strong local response about it closing down. Some Local Authority Officials don't seem to understand the requirements for LERCs as they think the NBN Atlas can do it all.

EW – LERCs are a key part of the BBD working well.

WH – Everyone needs to be clear about where all the parts (of the BBD/ LERC/ RG/ NBN) fit together. This is a big part of the BBD Project.

GD – the reason for this as the initial project was that in a relatively short space of time something could be created that would make a big positive difference nationally and locally.

IS – Back to JP’s point. There is a huge value in local “ad-hoc” records. In the last State of Nature Report more than 50% of the indicators were supported by ad-hoc recording.

GR – The staffing structure in Slide 3 doesn’t match the project team titles in the phasing table. This was rectified and the slide amended by GD during the meeting.

WH – The business analyst needs to speak to the end users to ensure that the projects delivers what they need. Requirement gathering needs to be scoped out in the time and cost of the project. How is the decision on this issue going to be made?

JW – The Consortium Agreement (between LERCs, Recording Groups, NBN Trust, SBIF etc.), which will need to be agreed before the project can get going will be where these issues are thrashed out and an agreed way of working together agreed upon.

RS – Marine Recorder is being redeveloped and this may be relevant to a potential terrestrial application.

### **Governance (EW).**

It is proposed that the Project Management Group is made up of one representative from each of SBIF, Funder, Host Organisation (who would be the chair) and LERC rep, The SBIF Advisory Group would be the Steering Group.

The host organisation would be in charge of day-to-day governance.

### **5) SBIF AG Focus during BBD Project [All]**

EW proposed the two points below as the SBIF “project” won’t stop just because the BBD project is underway, there is more to do.

- Digital interface data flows. How does data flow? Are there small steps we can undertake between our organisations that will unlock a much greater cumulative impact?
- Super Partner data flows. Can museums, LERCs, BRC etc. What can we do to unlock our dataflows?

EW asked if everyone was supportive of these proposals?

DR – Very happy to have a discussion about iRecord. There has been verifier training in England and this could be looked at in relation to Scotland.

DR There has been a lot of recent focus on Lepidoptera recording and verification, with BRC working with Butterfly Conservation to deliver iRecord verification training for county recorders.

NF – Keen to get involved as a Superpartner. The [Darwin Tree of Life project](#) aims to sequence 72,000 species in the UK and [Bio Scan](#) will be use barcode scanning to assess and monitor changes in biodiversity. Both have a huge need for local input and expert taxonomic knowledge, particularly since accurate identification is required at the point of collection

JP – The [Blue Carbon Forum](#) has just been launched looking to link the conservation of the high carbon habitats. Would SBIF be interested in looking at this?

EW – Yes.

IS – SBIF helped NS hold an internal data workshop and the outcome was that it helped confirm both NS’ own data needs and the value and priority to the organisation of local ad-hoc recording.

SM – Oyster Reef restoration – there has been one high profile one in Scotland already, in the Dornoch Firth <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/17650477.go-firth-multiply-dornoch-oyster-bed-restoration-copied-europe/> he whole blue carbon argument is a great opportunity to showcase some of the marine data we have.

JW – See [Project Seagrass](#)

Note. [Turquoise seas in the Clyde](#) the push for carbon sequestration by marine habitats could have the same beneficial effects as peatland restoration on land in that Carbon is the focus and what gets the money but it is also a massive area of habitat restoration that would never have got the funding if that has been its primary aim.

**AP AG19 - 02.** *DR and JW to organize a meeting to discuss what opportunities for action there are in Scotland with BRC.*

**AP AG19 – 03.** *JP and JW to arrange a meeting to discuss Blue Carbon and SBIF.*

## **6) Development Officer Update [JW]**

- The quarterly Highlight Report was circulated before the meeting.
- One day a week now (usually a Tuesday). Focusing on securing a host organisation for the BBD project.
- SBIF mention in “Strategy for Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture Research 2022-2027”.
- SBIF mention in “Development of a Combined Marine and Terrestrial Biodiversity Indicator for Scotland” report.
- Mapping the Species Data Pathway: Connecting species data flows in England Report. It says the SBIF is “Trailblazing in Scotland”.
- SBIF held in high esteem by its peer organisations.
- My focus is keeping everyone in touch and facilitating the hosting discussions between SBIF and NBN Trust.

GR asked if there had been any further communication from the Welsh LERCs since the February meeting.

JW responded the notes of that meeting hadn’t been completed yet but would be by next week and hopefully there will be feedback after receipt of them.

## **7) Scottish LERC update [GR]**

This update was circulated before the meeting. GR read out the highlights.

**AP AG19 – 04.** *The Scottish LERC Update to be added as standing agenda item.*

EW noted HBRG’s frustration with the slow progress of SBIF but we all want things to happen more quickly. She was pleased to hear that so much was happening all over the country.

IS noted that the LERCs had not heard about their NS funding for this FY. He said that the NS funding for LERCs had been approved and he believed the letters were to go out this month, but he would chase this matter up with colleagues. Glasgow Museums are putting a business case together for NS to look at. The LERC review was a very useful update.

LC commented on the instability that some LERCs had found to the NBN Atlas. The issue had been due to a lack of memory (it has been an issue for about 6 months). More memory was a quick fix but more needs to be done. The NBN staff have been diving deep into the code and system architecture to see if it is fit for purpose. This is a major issue to be dealt with as there is a growing use of data, more data coming in and more data users. It is a top priority for the team who are working flat out to solve the problem.

GR mentioned restrictions were causing them issues with outdoor events. WH has looked closely at the SG guidance and she forwarded on information to the AG about how LERCs can interpret the guidance for events run for educational purposes and by charities.

## 8) Marine Data Review update [RS]

RS presented her slides. JW circulated them immediately after the meeting.

Her project is underway and the first meeting of the Project Advisory Group has taken place.

SM – Have you had much engagement with SEPA. RS Yes, through Janet Khan. SM said he'd get in touch with his colleague to find out more.

SM – he is involved with developing a method to assess the risk of spatial impacts of human activities on marine water bodies, including on Priority Marine Features outside of designated areas. Data is particularly important to be able to undertake this.

JP – is excited to see the outcome of the questionnaire. She is very involved in data collection and use. Also, there is a great deal of data in existence that isn't accessible.

SM – SEPA estimates that it may have a million individual species-location-date records for freshwater invertebrates, fish and plants and may have the same order of magnitude of records for marine invertebrates, algae and fish. The marine records may be held and catalogued in marine data warehouses and repositories (e.g. Proudman) rather than in biodiversity databases (NBN), something to bear in mind. SEPA are a major holder and potentially provider of data, and this will soon increase with their introduction of eDNA/ DNA sampling.

RS – [SAMS](#) said their eDNA goes to global portals and there is work to be done to make this data much more accessible at the local/ Scottish/ UK level. There are ongoing discussions with colleagues at SAMS about their requirements for improving the accessibility and sharing of eDNA data that they collect and work with.

NatureMetrics recent launch of an eBioAtlas <https://www.naturemetrics.co.uk/projects/ebioatlas/> for freshwater eDNA data has sparked discussions about the benefits of having a similar portal for marine eDNA. SAMS are sketching out the existing data flow pathway for Scottish marine eDNA data to repositories/archives/portals and the barriers that exist in the efficiency etc. to feed into the marine biodiversity data review that is being undertaken, led by NS as part of SBIFs work.

## 9) Date of next meeting [All]

- 21<sup>st</sup> or 28<sup>th</sup> September.

**AP AG19 – 05.** *JW to send round a Doodle Poll to arrange the date.*

## 10) Any other business

None.

**The meeting ended at 3.47pm.**