NBN
National Biodiversity Network

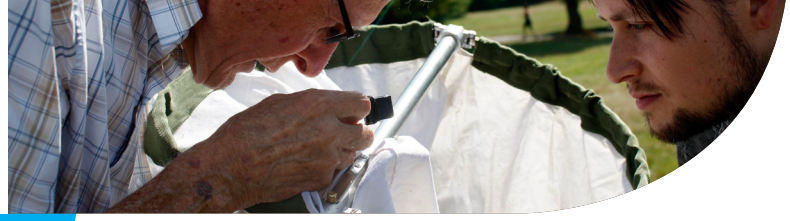
Bristol Natural History Consortium

Let's Talk About Data

Communication principles for the wildlife recording community

This toolkit has been designed in consultation with 90 members of the UK recording community and communications experts to help recorders, organisations and volunteer groups communicate about recording and data more effectively.

Let's Talk About Data



INTRODUCTION

Recording wildlife is a great British tradition stretching back to the 1700s and the days of **Gilbert White**. In the 21st Century, recording in the UK is still a triumph of public contribution to our collective knowledge of the natural world. Devoted volunteers and enthusiasts generate vast databanks supporting environmental policy, research and practice with baseline data for thousands of native and non-native UK species. As threats to UK wildlife mount, the need to grow the evidence base for effective conservation becomes increasingly vital. We need effective communications tools to be able to share this amazing energy and support an accessible, well-informed recording culture. This will help to ensure that all new and existing recorders receive the support and motivation to collect and contribute high quality, useable data as standard.

This toolkit has been designed in consultation with 90 members of the UK recording community and communications experts to help recorders, organisations and volunteer groups communicate about recording and data more effectively. Bringing together the experience, skills and knowledge of the sector, this set of first principles is a step towards more positive communication around biological data and should be a helpful resource to refer to whether you are talking face-to-face, writing or sharing stories online.

Find out more about the consultation and rationale behind this approach in the accompanying framework document. Download the framework at **www.bioblitzuk.org.uk**.

Contents

2 Communicating about recording: some basic principles

3 Who are you talking to?

4 THE SPECIALIST

5 THE LOCAL

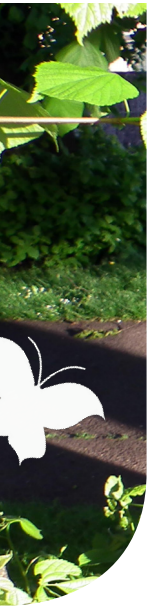
6 THE PSL (Pan Species Lister)

7 THE GENERALIST

8 THE NEWBY

9 - 10 FAQS and how to handle them

Communicating about recording: some basic principles



Keep it simple – launching into detail can be bewildering and make people switch off so stick to the 'need to knows'. Let the audience decide if they want to ask for more detail or wider context.

Stay positive – there are challenges with the way we manage data as a community but that shouldn't be our opening gambit, especially with new recorders. There is a lot to celebrate so always start there!

Encourage, don't enforce – regulation and standardisation are hugely important, but nobody likes being told what to do. Highlight the **value** of greater accuracy and using pre-set formats (for example), and you will likely get a much more positive response.

Show me, don't tell me – the wildlife that we record and the data outputs that we create can be astonishing! Use tangible examples to show people how recording works for wildlife and people – don't just tell them that it matters.

Share stories – as a social species, we generally respond much better to human stories than straight facts. Ooze enthusiasm and share your own experiences of recording to help the audience discover their own 'recorder identity'.

5 KEY POINTS TO GET ACROSS

Awareness – Look what we do!

Confidence – You can do it too! AND we can help you!

Value – Look what comes out of it! AND here's how you can make sure your sightings can contribute!

Belonging – Look at all these great people doing the same thing! What type of recorder could you be?

How – Here's how to do it really well! Look at all these helpful gadgets you can use!

Who are you talking to?

Recognising what motivates your audience is crucial to engaging people with your key messages. You might want them to take up a particular practice or join in a new project – how can you highlight their existing motivations to make your proposal attractive to them? Research has shown that wildlife recorders may be particularly motivated by:

- contributing to the knowledge and/or conservation of wildlife locally or more widely
- personal development and slowly building up skills and expertise
- the satisfaction of sharing skills and knowledge with others

This section looks at 5 "types" of wildlife recorder to help disentangle the different ways that recorders collect, submit and manage their data. This forms part of their 'recorder identity' and is a big part of their motivation for being involved.

These identity profiles are designed to help point recorders towards the most suitable resources, data pathways and advice for their preferred style of recording. Many people will feel that they span more than one profile but simplifying like this should help start that conversation initially.

THE SPECIALIST –
Takes a special interest in one or two groups, not necessarily tied to a set location

THE LOCAL –
Sticks mostly to one geographic area recording one or many different groups

THE PSL (Pan Species Lister) –
Persistent in recording everything they see

THE GENERALIST –
Likes to dip into lots of different groups without going into too much detail

THE NEWBY –
Keen to learn but needs support to build confidence

YOU MIGHT ALSO COME ACROSS:

- **The Rarity Spotter –** occasionally records rare sightings only, ignores common species. *Praise The Rarity Spotter for contributing and highlight the additional value of recording the everyday sightings in mapping trends and changes over time – every record counts!*
- **The Hoarder** – collects amazing records and keeps them under their bed. *Ask about The Hoarder's records, show your interest in their knowledge and highlight the value of what we can learn from bigger, collated datasets.*

THE SPECIALIST

Primarily interested in one or two different taxonomic groups. The Specialist is keen on building up their knowledge and ID skills and could be anywhere along their learning journey from beginner to expert.

Although they have their favourite haunts, The Specialist is keen to observe their chosen group wherever they are and may cover a wide geographic area.

WHERE TO FIND KINDRED SPIRITS

There is a lot of support out there where The Specialist can find like-minded folk only too keen to share specific knowledge and skills. This helps to **build confidence** to identify and record valuable data points.

- Online special interest communities – e.g. **UK Hoverflies on Facebook**
- Local naturalists special interest groups – **Find Nature Groups Near You through the Natural History Museum**
- Special interest organisations
- Training courses and workshops– **Find a great selection through the Field Studies Council**

WHAT TO DO WITH RECORDS

The Specialist may be best suited to recording for a **National Recording Scheme or Society**. These special interest groups host the most in depth knowledge about their chosen taxonomic groups and can offer tailored advice and support.

Find National Recording Schemes and Societies on the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) website.

Many schemes and societies send their data on to the NBN where it contributes to national databases and the NBN Atlas. Make sure you ask your scheme whether they will pass on your data.

YOUR RECORDS MAKE GOOD THINGS HAPPEN

One of the strongest motivators for recorders is a sense of contribution so it is important to highlight specific examples of the amazing outputs that come from people submitting records. The Specialist may be especially keen to contribute towards:

- **Species Atlases**
- Specialist research
- **State of Nature Reports**

THE LOCAL

The Local devotes their energies to a particular space or region, observing wildlife as another way to engage with their favourite patch.

The Local may have a preference for certain taxonomic groups but is generally keen to observe anything that shows up on their territory and develop a wide generalist knowledge over time.

WHERE TO FIND KINDRED SPIRITS

There is a lot of support out there where The Local can find like-minded folk only too keen to share knowledge and skills. This helps to build confidence to identify and record valuable data points.

- Local naturalists special interest groups – **Find Nature Groups Near You through the Natural History Museum**
- Local Wildlife Trust – **Find yours here**
- Local **museum collections** – **Find a museum**
- Training courses and workshops – **Find a great selection through the Field Studies Council**

WHAT TO DO WITH RECORDS

The Local may be best suited to recording for a **Local Environmental Records Centre (LERC)**. These regional institutions collect species and habitat data for a specific area and hold the most detailed local knowledge. They are often well connected locally and can offer tailored advice and support.

Find your Local Environmental Records Centre through ALERC.

Many records centres send their data on to the NBN where it contributes to national databases and the NBN Atlas. Makes sure you ask your LERC whether they will pass on your data.

YOUR RECORDS MAKE GOOD THINGS HAPPEN

One of the strongest motivators for recorders is a sense of contribution so it is important to highlight specific examples of the amazing outputs that come from people submitting records. The Local may be especially keen to contribute towards:

- Local planning policy and decision making
- Site management and conservation designations (SNCI, LNR, etc.)
- Habitat mapping
- Systematic recording and long term monitoring

THE PSL (Pan Species Lister)

The Pan Species Lister (or PSL) is an example of the all-round naturalist and competitive recorder. Keen to build their life list of species and annual records count, The PSL goes above and beyond to identify and record everything they see.

The PSL may lean towards certain taxonomic groups and likely have their favourite stomping grounds, but is keen to observe anything, anywhere from mountaintops to carparks. Although The PSL may or may not be highly expert, the intensity of Pan Species Listing helps develop a strong generalist knowledge bank over time.

WHERE TO FIND KINDRED SPIRITS

There is a lot of support out there where The PSL can find like-minded folk only too keen to share knowledge and skills alongside a dose of healthy competition. This helps to build confidence to identify and record valuable data points.

- Competitive recorder communities – **Find out more**
- Online communities – e.g. **iSpot communities**
- Training courses and workshops – **Find a great selection through the Field Studies Council**

WHAT TO DO WITH RECORDS

The Pan Species Lister may find **online platforms** (e.g. iRecord) the best way to database their records. These platforms offer a valuable data management tool and a useful catch-all for records, but your data may not be immediately available to end users.

Find out more about iRecord at: **www.brc.ac.uk/irecord**
If not using iRecord, be sure to check that your chosen platform sends all verified data on to the NBN where it contributes to national databases and the NBN Atlas.

YOUR RECORDS MAKE GOOD THINGS HAPPEN

As well as building their own personal lists, one of the strongest motivators for recorders is a sense of contribution, so it is important to highlight specific examples of the amazing outputs that come from people submitting records. The PSL may be especially keen to contribute towards:

- **Species Atlases**
- Specialist research
- **State of Nature Reports**
- Systematic recording and long term monitoring

THE GENERALIST

The Generalist is specifically non-specific, dipping into lots of different taxonomic groups without going into too much detail. Keen to build knowledge and skills at their own pace and follow wherever their interest takes them, The Generalist may shun the label of 'expert' and be very aware of what they do not know as much as what they do know.

Tending to favour more 'visible' or highlight species from a variety of taxonomic groups, the experience of being in nature may be more important to The Generalist than the act of recording itself.

WHERE TO FIND KINDRED SPIRITS

There is a lot of support out there where The Generalist can find like-minded folk only too keen to share knowledge and skills. This helps to build confidence to identify and record valuable data points. The Generalist may or may not wish to dip in and out of special interest groups or make local connections to give their activities more structured context.

- **BioBlitz events** – public engagement events where new recorders can get a taste of different recording techniques and different taxonomic groups
- Online special interest communities – e.g. **UK Hoverflies on Facebook**
- Training courses and workshops – **Find a great selection through the Field Studies Council**

WHAT TO DO WITH RECORDS

If most of their recording is confined to a particular region, The Generalist may find recording for a **Local Environmental Records Centre (LERC)** the most directly rewarding data pathway. For records outside their usual stomping grounds they may find **online platforms** (e.g. iRecord) useful as a catch-all.

Find your Local Environmental Records Centre through ALERC.

Find out more about iRecord at: **www.brc.ac.uk/irecord**

Be sure to check that your chosen platform will pass your data on to the NBN where it contributes to national databases and the NBN Atlas.

YOUR RECORDS MAKE GOOD THINGS HAPPEN

One of the strongest motivators for recorders is a sense of contribution, so it is important to highlight specific examples of the amazing outputs that come from people submitting records. The Generalist may be especially keen to contribute towards:

- The national overview of species and habitats (**NBN Atlas**)
- Engaging others in biological recording through public activities and education
- Local planning policy and decision making
- Site management and conservation designations (SNCI, LNR, etc.)

THE NEWBY

The Newby is just starting their recording journey and yet to decide what kind of recording they would like to take part in. With, at most, a rudimentary knowledge of how to record effectively, this is a key point to set in good habits for collecting, submitting and managing their records.

Whether they go on to become a Specialist, Local, PSL or Generalist, The Newby will need support and encouragement to build their confidence and sense of value in the records that they contribute.

WHERE TO FIND KINDRED SPIRITS

There is a lot of support out there where The Newby can find like-minded folk only too keen to share knowledge and skills. This helps to build confidence to identify and record valuable data points. The Newby may want to dip into any of the support networks for the other 4 profiles but may particularly benefit from:

- **BioBlitz events** – public engagement events where new recorders can get a taste of different recording techniques and different taxonomic groups
- Online communities – e.g. **iSpot communities**
- Training courses and workshops – **Find a great selection through the Field Studies Council**

WHAT TO DO WITH RECORDS

Helping The Newby identify the kind of recording they are most interested in will guide which data pathways will work best for them. **Test out the 4 profiles and see what would work best for you**.

Find National Recording Schemes and Societies on the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) website.

Find your Local Environmental Records Centre through ALERC.

Find out more about iRecord at: **www.brc.ac.uk/irecord**

Be sure to check that your chosen platform will pass your data on to the NBN where it contributes to national databases and the NBN Atlas.

YOUR RECORDS MAKE GOOD THINGS HAPPEN

One of the strongest motivators for recorders is a sense of contribution, so it is important to highlight specific examples of the amazing outputs that come from people submitting records. The Newby may be especially keen to contribute towards:

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FAQS and how to handle them

So what is a wildlife record? - When you see, hear or find positive evidence of a species presence in a particular place – that is a 'wildlife sighting'. We want to convert those sightings into viable wildlife records that are entered into an appropriate database. To do that we need:

- WHO - A record of who made the sighting (so we can check back with them if needs be)
- WHAT - A positive species identification (perhaps backed up with a photo)
- WHERE - The location of the sighting (usually in the form of a grid reference or GPS point)
- WHEN - The date of the sighting

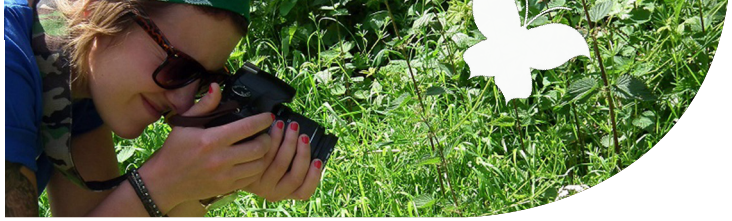
Once this data is entered into a database in the Local Environmental Records Centre or National Recording Scheme it becomes an official 'wildlife record'. Until the data reaches this point it has very limited value to the scientific and conservation community so it is really important that we follow the full process and not just leave our sightings in a draw somewhere.

Sorry, I'm no expert – There's no shame in that! We are all learning and with thousands of species in the UK alone, nobody knows everything! The important thing is to try your best and you'll pick up so much over time. There is a big, supportive community of fellow recorders out there very willing to help.

What if I'm wrong? – Some species are very difficult to distinguish and everyone makes mistakes. That is how we learn and build confidence in our ID and data collection skills. There is lots of help out there and Local Records Centres and National Recording Schemes sense check your records to make sure they are valid (have all the right info) and verified (likely to have the correct species ID).

What If I'm not sure? – The best way to build your knowledge is taking the time to confirm your sighting either by researching independently or with the help of fellow recorders. What's really important is not to guess or go for the picture that looks closest in the field guide. For many groups there are lots of species that superficially look very similar and an incorrect record should be screened out in data verification (**see what if I'm wrong?**).

FAQS and how to handle them



If I see something, who do I tell?

- Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs) collect data for a specific region and hold the most detailed local knowledge – perfect for The Local recorder.
- National Recording Schemes and Societies are especially interested in specific groups of wildlife and hold the most detailed knowledge about individual species distributions across the UK – perfect for The Specialist recorder.
- Some online platforms (e.g. iRecord) can act as a catch all for data – feeding records in to the appropriate database afterwards. This can be a helpful way to manage your records but your data may be slow to be verified and passed on, depending on the platform.

What happens to the records?

- Locally we can use records to help plan the way we manage sites and habitats for wildlife.
- Nationally we can examine larger scale trends in distribution of specific groups of wildlife to help inform national conservation research and policy.
- Many of these schemes also submit the data they receive on to the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) to create an overarching, open access database for research and policy planning. When you submit data, make sure you ask your LERC or recording scheme whether they will pass on your data.

What happens once I have submitted my record? - You may get contacted by someone who has volunteered to verify your record. They will check to make sure that the species you have seen is found in that type of location and if they are unsure they may get in touch by email to ask for further information (such as a photo, or details of how you identified it, any identifying features etc.)

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BioBlitz

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Bristol Natural History Consortium is a unique partnership between 14 organisations, committed to engaging people with the natural world through collaborative action.

Avon Wildlife Trust · Bath & North East Somerset Council · BBC · Bristol City Council · Bristol Zoo Gardens · Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs · National Trust · Natural England · University of Bath · University of Bristol · UWE Bristol · Wildscreen · WWT · Woodland Trust

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