



THE SUSSEX RECORDER

Proceedings from the
Biological Recorders' Seminar

held at

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INTRODUCTION

Tony Whitbread

This is the fourth in our series of annual Biological Recorders' Seminars and, once again, it was very well supported. About 70 people attended this year, significantly more than in 1992. The fact that the seminar is always well-attended by people who are active naturalists is, I believe, a very strong indication of the need for a meeting each year.

Every year, however, it is worth restating the original objectives of the seminar. Perhaps the overriding objective is simply to provide a chance for biological recorders to get together and chat. Naturalists often work in isolation with perhaps few chances for contact with other specialists. The seminar provides an opportunity for us all to become aware of the range of work that is being done, and who is doing it. Leading on from this we find that there is more opportunity for cross-fertilisation of ideas, between disciplines. Our work can then become more coordinated. It is my opinion that ecological details, obtained by specialist study of individual plant or animal groups, usually combine to tell one ecological story. Different groups may be responding in different ways to the same ecological variables. By combining our knowledge we should be able to learn more about those ecological variables. A further objective of the seminar is to bridge the gap between scientific information and conservation action. If we can organise ourselves, and our data, efficiently we should be more able to achieve conservation on the ground - whether this is by responding knowledgeably to development proposals, or by directly managing a site appropriately.

The programme for the 1993 seminar follows the pattern that was set in 1992, and which seems to be a successful formula. To start with there are short reports on two of the main information gathering and storage systems used in Sussex: the Environmental Survey Directory - a directory on the location of information, and the Sites of Nature Conservation Importance project which details the locations of important non-designated wildlife sites. Following this are the two major papers of the seminar, one on a heathland survey carried out by Francis Rose and the other a discussion about geological conservation by John Cooper. The second half of the seminar consists of shorter reports on individual surveys and profiles of certain wildlife sites.

THE SUSSEX ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEY DIRECTORY - 1993 UPDATE

Simon Curson

The Problem

The Sussex Environmental Survey Directory was conceived to overcome a problem...

In Sussex there are many recorders, naturalists and natural history and conservation societies who between them hold much valuable and useful data.

Voluntary and statutory bodies involved with nature conservation in Sussex regularly and frequently require information on specific sites in Sussex. These bodies may well be unaware of information on a site that they would require or which would be useful to them. Even if they do know of its existence they may well not know where to get hold of information.

Much time and energy is wasted trying to locate surveys and data and much important data is not used because some people are unaware of its existence.

The Solution

The Sussex Environmental Survey Directory aims to produce a Directory of who holds what information and where, by storing information as to the location of survey data along with a summary of the surveys' contents.

This means that to find out what information exists on a site and where to go to get hold of it, you simply have to contact the Directory.

The decision to release actual data always remains with the holder of the data because the Directory only contains details of the holder and not the data.

How Does it Work?

Up until now, anyone who wants any information needs to contact everyone they know to see if they have anything. Now the directory does this for them.

Details of the survey and each site covered in it are taken on recording cards. The recording cards are entered on to the computer, each survey being given a unique identification number.

Each site is drawn on to a base map of Sussex and its survey number is written alongside. So you end up with a map of Sussex showing all the areas that have been surveyed and numbers beside each one.

By simply tapping the relevant numbers into the computer you can immediately find out where information relating to a site is.

What Stage are we at now?

1. The Directory has been available for use since the end of last year.

We have had few enquiries as yet, but publicity material is being developed which will increase awareness of the Directory amongst environmental consultants, planners etc. and so use of the Directory should increase as people get to know of it.

2. Many volunteers have been enlisted to help extract data from surveys, map sites, and put data on to the computer. This has recently greatly increased the speed of data extraction.

3. So now all of the West Sussex S.N.C.I.'s are on, all the S.S.S.I.'s, all the data held at East Sussex County Council, and a lot of the data at English Nature. With volunteer help I am going through the files at English Nature and at Sussex Wildlife Trust.

4. At the moment 464 surveys covering over 1,300 sites are fully on the Directory with more in the pipeline.

What Next?

This Summer we shall be presenting the Directory on a national scale at the Conservation Conference of the County Wildlife Trusts.

We hope that other County Wildlife Trusts will adopt the Directory as a means of locating survey data and that eventually it can run as a national network.

We will shortly be publicising the Directory to environmental consultants, District Councils, and other bodies involved with nature conservation.

Most importantly I need your help. The best method of putting surveys on to the Directory would be for those people carrying out a survey to fill out forms for each survey completed and send them to me for processing.

I am interested in any ecological surveys or data covering a specific site. To obtain survey and site forms to complete or for more information on the Directory please contact me.

Simon Curson

Sussex Wildlife Trust

Woods Mill

Henfield

AN UPDATE ON THE WEST SUSSEX SITES OF NATURE CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE (SNCI) PROJECT

Graham Roberts

To date 192 SNCIs have been identified in West Sussex (See Table 1). This represents about 3.5% of the total area of West Sussex, with a further 6% notified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Semi-natural vegetation covers some 20-25% of the County, with nearly half of this now identified as SSSIs or SNCIs. (West Sussex has a great many ancient semi-natural woodlands, many of which are neither SSSI nor SNCI).

Table 1 : Numbers and areas of SNCIs in each District and Borough in West Sussex.

District/Borough	Ad	A	Ch	C	H	MS	W	W.Sx
Number of SNCIs	7	9	81	11	43	33	11	192
Area of SNCIs (ha)	114	1190	3023	172	1469	776	167	6912

KEY

Ad = Adur A = Arun Ch = Chichester C = Crawley H = Horsham MS = Mid Sussex

W = Worthing W. Sx = Total for West Sussex

(NB. Several SNCIs extend across District/Borough boundaries and are thus credited to both)

Of course, merely labelling a site as an SNCI is unlikely to safeguard its wildlife value. Owners and managers of SNCIs need to be informed that their sites have been identified and why they are considered to be so important. Since May 1992 (when the first SNCIs were identified and the SNCI dossiers produced) 81 landowners have been contacted, the response having been most encouraging, with many owners welcoming the support and advice that can be offered. Each owner is given an extract from the SNCI dossier, including the description and map of their site, plus a leaflet entitled 'West Sussex Sites of Nature Conservation Importance: a guide for landowners'. Something which has struck me is how many SNCI owners had no idea that

their site was of particular wildlife value until taken on a guided walk of their own land! Opening their eyes to this can be most rewarding.

A time consuming aspect of the follow-up work is establishing the ownership of SNCIs. It is surprising, particularly in the countryside, that even fairly small sites can have a number of owners. Of course many landowners were contacted in order to obtain permission to conduct surveys.

As co-ordinator of the SNCI project, it is my job to put SNCI owners/managers in touch with the appropriate organisation/individual for assistance with practical help, grant aid, drawing-up of a management plan, further fieldwork, etc. One of the great strengths of this project is the tremendous support it receives in this and other ways.

Maintaining a large data-base of detailed ecological surveys is an extremely important part of my work. Being able to identify what data exist by referring to the Environmental Survey Directory will become increasingly useful to the SNCI project. I have a file for each of the 192 SNCIs, containing all correspondence, survey data and notes from site visits. Additionally I have colour slide photographs of many SNCIs. Such information is likely to prove invaluable in assessing and monitoring whether an individual site is being well managed.

Another important use of site-related data is to identify further SNCIs. I am extremely grateful to everyone who has proposed sites for consideration as SNCIs, and would like to encourage them to continue making recommendations. If you can provide supporting data so much the better.

During the past few months nine SNCIs have been subject to planning applications, e.g. Paintball games in an ancient woodland and a new farm access road across an old herb-rich meadow. This is where development control policies have come into effect. Informal consultations have also taken place concerning proposals for a reservoir, landfill, etc. within SNCIs. Early consultation, before the planning application stage is reached, can result in a potentially damaging scheme being withdrawn or perhaps modified to become something of actual benefit to conservation. We hope to use the SNCI concept to encourage early consultation.

Graham C M Roberts
Countryside Services
West Sussex County Council
Chichester

GEOLOGICAL SITE CONSERVATION IN SUSSEX

A Progress Report

John Cooper

Since 1975, the Booth Museum of Natural History has contained all of the natural history collections which belong to the Borough of Brighton. Among the collections are substantial holdings of geological specimens, mainly fossils, acquired since 1860, when the first donation of fossils was made. These collections form the heart of the concerns of the keepership of Geology, also established in 1975. However, they have proved to be the springboard from which a range of public services are now provided: identification, displays and exhibitions, teaching etc. Amongst these concerns, interest in the geological hinterland, which has been the source of so many of the collections, has grown and like museum geology departments in many other parts of the country, the Booth Museum is now the focus for geological site documentation and conservation.

Sussex has a special place in the history of geology; for, as the science was emerging at the end of the 18th century, Sussex geology was being carefully examined. John Farley constructed one of the earliest geological sections from London to Brighton in 1807, and later Gideon Mantell began his studies of the fossils of the South Downs, to appear as a volume under that title in 1822. Perhaps most significantly, he discovered the very first teeth of the huge, extinct lizards which were preserved in rocks of the Weald and which we know as dinosaurs. Many of the pits where he found dinosaur remains were located around Cuckfield but anyone now searching for these pits would be disappointed. Not only were they filled in even within Mantell's own lifetime, but also any records which help to identify their location have long gone. This is a typical problem which researchers into geological localities encounter and which site documentation seeks to solve; in hope for historic sites, but with certainty for current exposures.

Geological sites are prone to a large number of threats which affect their usefulness to geologists. The deliberate infilling of pits and quarries, such as happened to Mantell's pits, is one such threat and indeed current planning regulations for mineral extraction require details of restoration measures once working has ceased. Unplanned fly tipping is a hazard which is often encountered in pits which have no threat of legal infilling, as is flooding, which not only obscures exposure but also provides dangerous conditions for visitors. Overgrowth and undergrowth provide more attractive problems but obscure almost as effectively. Conversely, there are many examples throughout the country where the accessibility of geological sites has proved their undoing: scree build-up from enthusiastic hammering, the disappearance of

particular fossil horizons and the erosion of footpaths all contribute to the downfall of good sites, leaving to one side the effects of climbers on exposures like the high rocks of the Weald.

But it is not always one way traffic. The active conservation of geological sites has increased alongside the increase in damage. The volunteer conservation services have done wonderful work over the years, together with amateur geological societies. Major sites have benefited from funds supplied by English Nature and the Curry Fund of the Geologists' Association, not only to repair damage to old sites, but also to provide completely new or reworked sites.

Over the years, an infrastructure for geological site conservation has grown. With funding from the then Nature Conservancy Council, the National Scheme for Geological Site Documentation was emplaced in most museum geology departments. Country-wide there are almost 60 Records Centres. Here in Sussex, some 3,300 records have been gathered from published sources and are being added to in both number and quality of information. Much of this work has been undertaken by the voluntary help of members of the Brighton and Hove Geological Society. Currently, the Museum employs a geological surveyor who is identifying from these records the sites most likely to be chosen for conservation and visiting each in turn, as well as trying to add new sites as they are encountered. This work is funded by the Geologists' Association and both East and West Sussex County Councils. So far, about half of Sussex has been covered. Recently, the Booth Museum received a pilot version of a computer database to hold records of geological sites, a database similar to Recorder and written in the same language. So far, only the sites being visited by the surveyor are being entered on the database until the pilot is properly evaluated. Again, the work is being undertaken voluntarily by Geological Society members.

In recent years, there has been an upsurge of interest in geological site conservation, particularly from English Nature and its predecessor. Since 1977 the Geological Conservation Review has been systematically examining earth science SSSIs with a view to updating notifications. The Review is complete and the long job of publishing the results in a series of 51 volumes has begun. In 1990 the NCC published its *Earth Science Conservation in Great Britain - a Strategy*, accompanied by a detailed handbook providing good technical information about the practical procedures to be followed. Building on the work of the Conservation Review, the strategy formally established the requirement of sites which were to be conserved on grounds of local and regional importance. Such sites were named RIGS (Regionally Important Geological/ Geomorphological Sites). They are essentially analogous to non-statutory biological sites. They include wildlife trust reserves, local nature reserves, educational sites and de-notified SSSIs, as well as many others. The methodology for the selection, notification and management of RIG Sites is laid down in the Strategy. These processes are controlled by RIGS Panels, largely county-based, informal groups of individuals with appropriate expertise - teachers, planners, amateur and professional geologists. In Sussex, the RIGS Panel has recently been established and has set about the task of determining the criteria by which Sussex RIGS will be selected. The Panel is convened under the umbrella of the Sussex Wildlife Trust whose corporate expertise will be valuable to the processes of communicating geological site

conservation requirements. The continuing survey of sites and site information should culminate in a list of sites worthy of conservation which will be designated and notified to the planning authorities in due course. Management of geological sites to protect their geological interest will be a necessary consideration. In all of these developments, the amateur and professional geological community in Sussex will continue to play an important role.

John Cooper

Booth Museum of Natural History

Brighton

HEATHLANDS

Francis Rose

The study of old maps has shown a catastrophic loss of heathlands and acid grasslands in West Sussex, from 7505ha in 1813 to 871ha in 1971 and 671ha in 1981. This loss has resulted from the enclosure of common land, from planting with conifers, and especially from neglect.

The heathlands acquired their characteristic ecology in the Bronze Age or in some cases, even in the Mesolithic, and for centuries thereafter served the rural economy both as grazing land of poor quality and as a source of products such as peat for fuel and bracken for mattresses. The closely grazed areas became very rich ecologically. With the ending of that way of life the heaths were either planted with conifers or fell into neglect resulting in the spread of bracken, birch, pines, and rhododendron, all of which are invasive and lead to a loss of diversity of plant and animal species. First to go are the bryophytes and lichens which need closely cropped turf. For example, there were 18 species of *Cladonia* lichens on Lavington Common in 1975 but this had fallen to 4 species by 1991. There has also been a catastrophic decline in wet heath species such as clubmoss, sedges, and sundews.

Paradoxically the ending of peat cutting has been detrimental because the disturbed ground left by the removal of the thin crust of peat used to provide a habitat for sedges.

A recent survey of 30 sites found only a small number with extensive heathland remaining. Iping and Stedham Commons were the most extensive, followed by Heyshott and Ambersham Commons both of which are threatened by invasive pines. Bog Common, near Parham, used to have a good sequence from dry heath through to alder carr but is becoming overgrown by woodland. It is still not too late to rescue parts of Bog Common containing sphagnum moss and bog asphodel. The Sussex Wildlife Trust's reserve at Burton Pond contains cranberry, a very rare plant in the south of England, which needs frequent clearance of invasive vegetation in order to flourish.

Hurston Warren has good valley bog, also with much cranberry, with a transitional zone to dry heath containing sundews and rare bryophytes. The area is suffering from invasion by *Molinia* grass despite effort expended in conservation, and needs clearance of the former wet heath areas now covered by pine, birch and *Molinia*.

Experience has shown that the seeds of some wet heath plants are viable for long periods, and species such as sundews will regenerate after ground disturbance, especially that resulting from tree removal which has the extra benefit of allowing the water table to rise. Unlike sundews, clubmosses are better restored by transplanting than by natural regeneration, and such transplants have been successful at Lavington and Heyshott Commons. It is hoped that peat-paring at Iping and Stedham will create conditions for their reappearance.

A restoration of grazing would be the best way of managing the Sussex Heathlands but legal problems and the high cost of fencing make grazing feasible in only a few places. Herbicides may be used, with care, to control birch and bracken, but physical methods of removal may be needed to remove pines and rhododendron, and also bracken where the use of the herbicide Asulam is not possible. New Forest ponies could in theory be used to graze *Molinia* but would need professional supervision and supplementary food.

Although some disturbance of the ground is beneficial the damage caused to heathland by motorcycles is very severe, and such damage may persist for more than 30 years.

Attempts are being made by the National Trust to restore the heathland on Black Down, which is damaged by invasive pine and bracken. St. Leonards Forest is another area of poor land some of which could probably be restored to heathland; many plants would be expected to regenerate naturally from the seedbank present.

The wet-heath areas, richest in plant and invertebrate species, are most at risk from pine and birch invasion, and restoration efforts need to be focussed on those areas where they have become overgrown, by clearance and shallow rotovation.

Francis Rose

HEATHLANDS AS A HABITAT FOR INSECTS

Mike Edwards

Insects characteristic of heathland may be divided into those requiring pure heather stands and those occupying other habitats.

In the first group there are several specialised species each dependent on a particular stage of the growth cycle of heather. It is important for these species that areas representative of all stages of the growth cycle be present.

The second group covers species dependent on habitats other than pure heather heathland. It follows that a heathland rich in insect species is likely to include: bare sand, both damp and dry, including banks; ponds and bogs; scrub, which is important as a source of pollen and nectar before the heather flowers, as well as providing shelter; grasslands, especially those with a good variety of flowering herbs and annuals.

Small-scale disturbance helps to maintain and rejuvenate the different habitats and was provided under traditional heathland management by the feet of grazing animals. One of the most important, but often overlooked, aims of managing heathlands for wildlife should be to provide areas of small scale disturbance on a variable rotation.

Mike Edwards

A PATCHAM ALLEY REVISITED

J C Felton

Some of you may remember my account at this meeting last year of the alley way alongside my house in Patcham and the bees and wasps that I found there (this sounds like the start of Clochemerle!).

The main attractions in the alley were ground elder flowers and foliage, elder and wych elm foliage from suckers, and an old brick wall. At the end of the season all the herbage was cut back to maintain the footpath access and things looked rather bare. What would happen to the fauna?

I continued my studies in 1992. The herbage grew up to a slightly lesser extent than in the previous year. This had the effect of making access to the wall, and also to ivy growing on a fence behind the top of the alley, a little easier for flying insects.

I made collections on 9 occasions in 1992 (12 in 1991) and recorded 70 individuals of 20 species (101 of 27 in 1991). Overall, 11 species were taken in both years, 16 in 1992 only and 9 in 1993 only.

The chief difference between the two seasons was that I was absent in May 1992 during the main flowering of the ground elder and thus did not take a number of the common spring bees which I am sure were still present in 1992.

The greater exposure of the wall attracted the small spider hunting wasp, *Agenioideus cinctellus* which was present for over 2 months, and also 2 small metallic *Lasioglossum* bees. The ivy attracted 2 *Ectemnius* species not seen in 1992 with *sexcinctus* being a 'Notable B' species. The interesting *Crossocerus distinguendus* (RDB 3) increased its presence relative to the common *elongatus* in this, still its most westerly locality in Sussex.

Both richness and diversity, as measured by alpha of the log series, were less than in 1991, probably because of the absence of the spring bee captures. The overall diversity over the two years is very similar to the 1991 estimate.

Again the herbage was cut back at the end of the season, so what of 1993? My concern would be for the removal of nests in hollow twigs. As the regrowth was new, this may well be minimal.

A few conclusions may be apposite. Clearly, for such a group as the aculeates, it takes a considerable effort to build up a picture of a local fauna. There will be changes from year to year; factors including weather and habitat change will be involved.

On a wider scale, two points. To build up an overall picture for a locality, a number of visits by a range of specialists would be necessary. To provide this multidisciplinary cover in depth,

perhaps 'the powers that be' could designate chosen localities, perhaps for a year or two each, to concentrate the limited available effort. As a subsidiary point, since the actual taking of specimens is rightly a matter of general concern, would it be possible for the same 'powers' to certificate authorised recorders.

There are two main candidates for 'powers that be', in our situation, the SWT or the County Councils. The latter would probably carry greater weight with the public.

John Felton

CHICHESTER HARBOUR MANAGEMENT PLAN

Anne de Potier

A Management Plan is being prepared by Chichester Harbour Conservancy (with grant aid from English Nature and the Sports Council) for the whole of the Harbour, which comprises 11 square miles each of land and water, with a great variety of uses. Examples of these include internationally important bird populations, rare habitats, plants and invertebrates, about 20% of the yachts that use the Solent, commercial and amateur fishing, bait digging, recreational activities such as walking and birdwatching, holiday beaches, educational uses, agriculture and several settlements.

There are several areas of alleged conflict, some of which are not as serious as people believe. It is misleading to think of the issues as 'birds v. boats'. There is more conflict between different recreational uses, and between land-based recreation and conservation. Other issues include water quality, agricultural practice (especially in relation to set-aside, and controlled retreat of sea defences), development and coastal erosion. The aim of management is to address these, and produce solutions based on consensus and sustainability. The constitution of the Conservancy, with its Advisory Committee made up of representatives of the major user groups, helps towards this.

The draft Plan states objectives for particular topics - anything from dinghy racing to sea defences, including of course habitat and species conservation, and geology and archaeology. It then lists prescriptions, either by site, or in the case of harbour-wide topics, by subject.

Monitoring is of course a key element, and covers boat traffic and recreational uses as well as biological topics. Unfortunately environmental work has not been a high priority so far, so there are several baseline studies which are needed as well as repeats of work done in the 1970's and regular habitat/species monitoring. Any offers of help with biological work would be gratefully received!

Anne de Potier

Chichester Harbour Conservancy

Itchenor

LEVIN DOWN

Ann Griffiths

The role of the reserve manager in terms of recording is:

to ensure records are: made
 kept
 used

Reporting of records is also an important role - “selective” reporting is a privilege that should not be indulged in, e.g. “Levin Down is characterised by heather, honeysuckle and bracken, it has oak/hazel woodland and has been visited by lapwing, redshank and Russians” - does not give a true picture, but is literally correct.

Recording should not only be species orientated. Historical records give a good reference for present patterns, and event recording is vital to assess both management needs and planning.

Understanding the character of the reserve is vital - whilst Levin Down is about 25ha in extent, its interest is dependent on the survival of a thin soil layer about 50-75mm in thickness.

Results of biological recording are assisting with the development of management.

Plant recording is undertaken over the whole site, with certain regular transects. A common bird census is carried out at intervals. A "Pollard" transect for butterflies is now undertaken every year.

Other groups are covered when expertise is available - recently the site has been surveyed for lower plants and molluscs.

Mammals - Rabbits are increasing and humans are finding out about the guided walks and open days in increasing abundance!

A management plan is being developed using as a basis the data compiled from the recording work undertaken, but will undoubtedly recommend continued recording and monitoring to continue to increase our understanding of the processes taking place.

To conclude, Levin can correctly be described as “The Pride of West Sussex” reflecting not only the name of the round headed rampion which is a characteristic plant of the site, but also the efforts of the many volunteers who strive to conserve it for others to enjoy.

Anne Griffiths
Countryside Services
West Sussex County Council
Chichester

EBERNOE COMMON

Alf Simpson

WHERE 3 miles north of Petworth and 1 mile east of A283.

WHAT 72ha of ancient woodland notified as an SSSI in 1972.

A Grade 1 NCR site. A Tree Preservation Order covers all trees on site.

WHY Owners proposed to clear fell 4ha in northern woods
SWT purchased the site in July 1980 for £90,000.

CONSERVATION EFFORT The effort to maintain the reserve is 250 man days per year.

Reed Removal

From Furnace Pond and Fish Pond resulting in more open water and more aquatic plants. Two species of newt are found in the fish pond.

Holly Clearance

Resulting in increasing areas of heather and daffodils.

Hawthorn Removal

From 'Dennis Croft' resulting in expansion of the meadow area and many more cowslips.

Bracken Cutting or Pulling

From - Pylon Glade, The Flatt and Post 67. Two or three cuts are made per year.

Mowing

In - Pylon Glade, Bracken Patch, Butterfly Meadow, The Flatt, Post 67.

Pylon Glade

The central 1 1/2 metre slip is cut twice a year, alternate sides are cut every two years back to the shrub layer.

The wood white butterfly has returned.

Recording planned for the future

Continue butterfly transect.

Continue moth trapping in both glades.

Record bats every two years including 1993.

Record any unusual plants or group, e.g. 100 twayblades.

Carry out tree survey every 5 years, the next one being due in 1996.

Survey woodlice.

RECORDS FROM 1982 to present

Plants	358	
Fungi	382	
Mosses	82	
Liverworts	28	
Lichens	99	
Birds	76 (53 breeding)	
Amphibians	5	
Reptiles	4	
Snails	30	Slugs 11
Mammals	13	Bats 5
Moths	271 (including small black arches)	
Dragonflies	17	
True Bugs	33	
Butterflies	37	
Beetles	260 from 40 families	
Crickets etc	8	
Hymenoptera	21	
Diptera	104 with 61 hoverflies (6 rare)	

Alf Simpson

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