

# THE SUSSEX RECORDER

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## 1

**INTRODUCTION****Tony Whitbread, Sussex Wildlife  
Trust**

Last year the first of this series of Sussex biological recorders' seminars was held. This, I think, was a great success. Many people who are heavily involved in biological recording came along, and many more were contacted and kept informed later. There was general agreement that this kind of forum could be a good way of providing a link between biological recorders.

I think it is worth repeating some of the main points that came out of last year's seminar in order to set the scene for the topics covered this year.

- ◆ The main purpose of biological recording (apart from personal enjoyment) is to monitor changes in species or habitats, to study the requirements of different species and find out how they respond to change and to use any survey information as a tool for the protection of the more important wildlife sites.
- ◆ A main theme is therefore how biological recording is converted into practical conservation action.
- ◆ To achieve this there is a need for good communications between recorders.
- ◆ There should be good coordination between recorders. At present some sites may be well-visited whilst perhaps equally valuable sites are less well surveyed. Better coordination should result in a better spread of survey information.
- ◆ There needs to be a proper channel for records so that important surveys are not lost or simply forgot about after a short time.
- ◆ There needs to be a way of finding out about records - who holds what information? Those needing to build a case to protect a site will need to know how to find information quickly. Equally, someone carrying out an academic project will provide a more valuable result if they can quickly sift existing information.
- ◆ Recorders need to know about each other, not just each others data - thus different specialists can be consulted about the value of a particular site, for example.

Hopefully many of these points will be addressed by this series of biological recorders seminars. The seminar itself should result in better communications between recorders.

The Environmental Survey Directory (Chapter 2) should provide a recognisable channel for records and help greatly with the organisation and use of survey work.

When it comes to the use of survey work, the Sites of Nature Conservation Importance project (Chapter 4) shows how information can be collated so that valuable sites can be recognised and given some degree of protection.

## 2

**THE ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEY DIRECTORY****Andrew Lee, Sussex Wildlife Trust**

The Environmental Survey Directory (ESD) is set to improve the organisation and accessibility of data in Sussex by an order of magnitude. Once complete, there will be a set of 1:10000 maps, records cards and a computer database with both County Councils, English Nature, the Sussex Wildlife Trust and the Booth Museum. This will provide a point of contact for anyone wishing to find out who has surveyed a particular site, how and when they did it, and where the information is held.

During 1990 Mrs Biddy Jarzembowski was employed to set up the ESD and to extract records of surveys from the five supporting organisations. This work was paid for by the two County Councils and the Sussex Wildlife Trust, with the Nature Conservancy Council (now English Nature) providing office space and administration, and the Booth Museum giving valuable volunteer support.

The funding for this work ended last November, leaving the consortium with a basic system on cards and maps and an untested computer software package. Despite the technical problems in extracting records of surveys, the ESD now has records of 309 surveys on 290 sites.

Further work by staff and volunteers at Woods Mill has been carried out over the winter and, at this moment, a sandwich student from Hatfield Polytechnic is ironing out problems on the software system and writing "help" sections. The 'site' and 'survey' record cards, which form the basis of the system, have been improved and simplified, and a leaflet produced which describes the ESD to potential users and sponsors.

After one year of development we have a system which works but holds relatively little data. We are now seeking funding for a second year of development, with the aim of cataloguing the whereabouts of as much data as possible from recording groups, organisations and individual naturalists. At present, we are discussing funding from several Local Authorities, NRA, National Trust and consultants, with the aim of appointing a compiler full or part-time for a year.

Over the coming year we need YOUR HELP to make the system work. The new survey and site cards are designed to be as simple to use as possible whilst giving us enough information to find your work in ten years' time. If every recorder filled out just ten survey cards this year, the databank on ESD would be greatly expanded.

Please look at the cards and, if possible, start using them whenever you carry out a survey. Completed cards should be sent to:

The Environmental Survey Directory,  
c/o Sussex Wildlife Trust,  
Woods Mill, Henfield,  
West Sussex. BN5 9SD

Blank cards can be obtained from the same source.

If we are able to appoint a compiler he/she may be able to visit you this year and help extract records of surveys. In the meantime - the information you collect represents precious hours of skilled time; if you want it to be used to further nature conservation then RECORD ITS EXISTENCE with ESD!

### 3

## DATA STORAGE BY COUNTRYSIDE ORGANISATIONS

### Introduction

Each biological recorder will probably have their own method of filing or storing the information they collect. To the main countryside organisations, however, the collecting and storing of information is a considerable problem. Incoming information can be very different in terms of the scale of an area covered, the presentation of results, recording method (site based, grid square based or species based) and quality of information.

Each organisation, however, often relies very heavily on the provision of survey information by recorders around the county. It is therefore important that recorders are confident that information sent to these organisations is properly appreciated, does go into a reliable system and does not just become lost in a heap of papers.

This section therefore describes briefly what system of data storage is used by each of five countryside organisations.

### **West Sussex County Council. Ann Griffiths.**

The WSCC is presently evolving a new system. Information on the Council's own sites of nature conservation interest (eg nature reserves) is stored at County Hall. This includes Annual Reports written for some LNR's, management plans, records collected by Rangers, and details of management work carried out.

Old records are stored on paper in Parish files - these are being reorganised into a 10km square system.

Habitat recording by aerial photograph analysis has been carried out since 1971, and will soon be computerised.

The plan is to computerise all data storage eventually.

### **East Sussex County Council. Alex Tait.**

The ESCC system is concerned with sites, rather than species, and holds very little information overall. The information is filed according to borough/district and parishes. Country parks and LNRs do have systematic recording where there is a warden.

The emphasis is on computerised data storage, with Environmental Survey Directory, SSSI and LNR sites being entered. Also, specific recording is carried out by the County Ecologist. Phase I interpretation of 1988 aerial photographs is computerised.

## English Nature

Data which is stored in regional or sub-regional offices is strongly associated with SSSIs, and so tends to be site based. Not computerised at present, but this approach is being developed. Data not relating to SSSIs is filed according to 10km square.

Data stored nationally, at EN's headquarters in Peterborough includes a large amount of information on specific habitats and details on the distributions of certain rare species etc. This is generally site based and filed according to County, Region and grid reference. Computerisation here is more advanced than in the regions.

## Sussex Wildlife Trust. Tony Whitbread.

Data is stored in a 10km square system on paper, with information specifically dealing with reserves being stored in reserve files. Larger surveys covering many sites are stored separately, according to subject matter, and cross-referencing is being carried out.

An example was given on how information is handled:-

1. The Trust receives a copy of the survey with a map and an explanatory letter.
2. The Conservation Officer acts on information if appropriate - eg if it indicates a threat to a site or species etc.
3. Survey is logged onto the Environmental Surveys Directory (Chapter 2), by filling in a SURVEY form (which covers name of site and name of survey, habitats represented, description of site, etc.). The area covered, as marked on a map enclosed with the survey, will be marked onto the Survey Directory map.
4. The original survey and map will be filed under the appropriate 10km square in a filing archive.

Special points:-

If sending information to Woods Mill PLEASE:- put your explanatory letter and survey information on separate pieces of paper, so they can be filed separately - otherwise it means a lot of photocopying and cross-referencing. Please also include a map showing the area covered by your survey, as this information is invaluable.

## Booth Museum. Gerald Legg and Edward Jarzembowski.

Specimens received at the Museum are all given a unique number which is logged on computer. This is essential, as there is tight legislation for species protection, and each animal must be identifiable, and have a full history of where it came from.

Individual specimen collections are also recorded, so they can be easily located.

The Plant Atlas was produced in 1980 and the publication of information in this way is seen as a very good way of getting information to the public, rather than just to a small group of specialists. This has recently been updated. Other publications and papers are produced, and are available to the public.

Urban wildlife records for Brighton are filed according to 'Wards'. This is a useful political tool, as it means that information for administrative areas is easily located, and interpreted - the 10km square system is not easily matched to ward boundaries. EJ has found this approach is welcomed by local authorities, and makes them more willing to co-operate with conservationists' views.

## 4

# WEST SUSSEX SITES OF NATURE CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE

**Graham Roberts, West Sussex County Council**

## Introduction

A new project was launched in May 1990 to identify, protect and assist with the management of important wildlife sites throughout West Sussex. These sites are known as Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI).

The project is jointly funded by West Sussex County Council, District and Borough Councils, English Nature, the Sussex Wildlife Trust and the World Wide Fund for Nature. Graham Roberts has been appointed as Assistant Ecologist in West Sussex County Council's Planning Department to co-ordinate and direct the project. He is working directly with two Field Surveyors, Louise Clark and Marion Finch, who are based at the Sussex Wildlife Trust, Woods Mill, Henfield.

## Definition of SNCI

Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs) are sites identified on account of special interest of their flora and/or fauna, (ie sites with very considerable wildlife value). Designation of SNCIs in no way diminishes the importance of other areas of semi-natural habitat in the County. All semi-natural habitat is important for wildlife.

Sites within both rural and urban areas are considered for SNCI status. However, the evaluation process considers rural and urban sites in a different context. Rural sites must be of County-wide importance to qualify as SNCIs. Urban sites must be of significant nature conservation value to the surrounding urban area, and used by the local community.

## SNCI Selection

SNCIs will be selected from a County-wide data-base of ecological survey data. The broad criteria used by English Nature for the selection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) have been adopted for SNCI selection. Thus the following criteria will be considered:-

- ◆ Size
- ◆ Recorded History
- ◆ Diversity
- ◆ Position in Ecological Unit
- ◆ Naturalness
- ◆ Potential Value
- ◆ Rarity
- ◆ Intrinsic Appeal

- ◆ Fragility
- ◆ Typicalness

The selection process will be made by a panel of professional ecologists which includes representatives from West Sussex County Council, English Nature and the Sussex Wildlife Trust.

SNCIs encompass all the major habitat types in the county, including woodland, calcareous and neutral grassland, heathland, coastal habitats, ditch systems, ponds and lakes.

## Objectives

The objective of SNCI status is to protect such areas from harmful landuse and land management changes and to encourage sensitive site management. This will be achieved through their recognition in Structure and Local Plan policies for protection and implementation, and the dissemination of the information to farmers, landowners and other land managing agencies.

## End Product

The end product will be a dossier on a District by District basis containing site maps and details of SNCIs in the County.

The nature conservation interest of most SNCIs can only be maintained through appropriate management, which largely depends on the goodwill of owners and occupiers.

Assessment and designation of SNCIs is a continuing process and some new sites will be notified and others de-notified as scientific knowledge of the total resource increases.

## How you can help

If anyone knows of important sites (other than nature reserves and SSSIs) deserving further protection I would be very pleased to hear from them. Any supporting ecological data would be most useful.

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## 5

# NATIONAL CO-ORDINATION OF BIOLOGICAL RECORDING

**Paul T. Harding, Biological Records Centre**

## Introduction

Biological recording for scientific purposes has a long tradition in Britain going back at least as far as the late 17th century with botanists such as John Ray and J. J. Dillenius. Despite this early start, a 'national biological survey' has never existed; although national topographical, geological and soil surveys have been created as government agencies.

It is only in the second half of the 20th century that a need for information on the occurrence of our natural flora and fauna has been perceived, initially as a response to awareness of our natural heritage and the need for research, and more recently in using species as indicators of the 'health' of the natural environment. The basic information on the occurrence of species has been supplied by 'biological recording'. This article describes the need for national co-ordination of biological recording and the attempts being made to fill that need.

## A definition of biological recording

In an earlier publication (Harding 1990a) a definition of biological recording was attempted: it is the collection, collation, storage, dissemination and interpretation of spatially and temporally referenced information on the occurrence of biological taxa, assemblages and biotopes. Basic information on occurrence is normally augmented and amplified with a variety of related biological, environmental and administrative information. Biological recording normally excludes information on agricultural, horticultural or forestry crops, and agricultural, domestic or captive stock, except where it may concern wildlife, biotopes or the management of semi-natural areas.

## The purpose of biological recording

At the 1990 meeting, Lee (1990) defined the purposes of recording, in the local context, as being for: mapping and monitoring, site protection and ecological studies of species. Other purposes motivate local recording, such as taxonomy and education. The recreational value of recording should not be overlooked - it should be enjoyable.

In the national context all the same purposes are relevant. Perhaps there are different priorities, for example BRC is interested in biogeographical research and the effects of environmental changes on species and communities. The national collating agencies, such as BRC, BTO, RSNC and the new nature conservation bodies require the national overview provided by being able to collate information from authoritative local sources.

## National Surveys

The national survey of flowering plants was initiated by the Botanical Society of the British Isles in 1954 and from this origin has grown the national Biological Records Centre which now covers over 16,000 species of plants and animals with its recording schemes (Harding 1990b, Harding & Sheail in press). In addition, the former Nature Conservancy Council, the British Trust for Ornithology, the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust and the British Lichen Society have conducted national surveys of various groups of plants and animals.

## The local dimension

Biological recording at a local level has always predated national initiatives: John Ray drew upon the expertise of local naturalists to compile the first British flora (Stearn 1973). The same is true today, and biological recording is in progress, for some group or other, in every corner of the United Kingdom. There are local records centres in most English Counties, usually operated by a county, district or city council. County wildlife trusts are conducting surveys of important sites and of the wider countryside and some compiling databases or are operating records centres. In some areas, local authorities are conducting or sponsoring surveys. Above all the local naturalists are getting together to survey and to record, usually on a county basis. Although there has probably been a decline in the fortunes of local natural history societies in the second half of the 20th century, local specialist groups have never been stronger, with butterfly, badger, bat and botanical groups thriving in many counties.

## Need for national co-ordination

There is a lot of recording going on, but this very enthusiasm for recording creates its own problems, in particular of continuity of recording and the availability of information and in the need for agreed minimum standards.

### 1. Continuity of recording

Although there is little doubt that naturalists will continue to record, there is less certainty about the continued existence of the types of agencies which are central to the collation, interpretation and publication of the results of recording. Funding for local records centres is always subject to the uncertainties of local authority finances. Wildlife trusts are dependent on their ability to attract funding from charitable sources. Government policy can alter apparently stable structures such as NCC or NERC at very short notice. For these and related reasons there is a clear need to provide recognition for biological recording and to ensure stability and funding for at least the agencies concerned with collating information.

### 2. Availability of information

Information collected locally has clear and immediate uses at the local level. In Sussex this has been recognised and as a result, the Sussex Directory of Environmental Surveys has been compiled which describes the resource of information in the county (Griffiths 1990). Few other counties have approached the need for information in such a comprehensive way.

For many taxonomic groups, it is not practicable to have a local specialist group or even a local expert. Sussex is relatively well served with resident experts, but in many other counties it is difficult to raise specialists to cover even the most popular groups. Some groups will always have a very sparse following, but even centipedes and charophytes have an important role to play in our understanding of the natural environment! In these cases there is need for some form of recording framework, such as the national recording schemes operated through BRC, to cover less popular groups and underworked areas.

National agencies, such as BRC and BTO, need to collate data on a national scale for biogeographical and ecological studies and to be able to provide the national overview to both the local naturalists and to our European colleagues. NCC formerly had a national (Great Britain) responsibility, but the extent to which this role will continue among the four new agencies is still unclear. What is certain is that the three new national conservation agencies will still require information on sites and species that they cannot provide themselves and for which they will depend on local expertise in some form.

## Standards and accreditation

Britain is a nation of individualists and we prefer to go off and do things in the ways that we chose and understand rather than wait to be organised. In that way we have got things done! However such an attitude creates problems for those who need to collate and interpret information from a variety of sources. There is a need for agreed minimum standards for the collection, storage, protection and dissemination of information from biological recording. At present anyone can set themselves up as a records centre, as a county recorder or as an expert in a particular group. This has already led to a number of problems with records being lost or hoarded and therefore not accessible to those who would wish to use them. There is a clear need for some form of accreditation of records centres and similar agencies which should probably operate on a voluntary basis. Such a proposal has already been put forward by both the National Federation for Biological Recording and by the Biological Recording in Scotland Campaign.

## Role of the Co-ordinating Commission for Biological Recording

The Commission was formed under the chairmanship of Sir John Burnett early in 1990. It is almost the final stage in a long process towards developing national policies in biological recording which began in 1984 (Anon 1985) and has come via various working groups and meetings (Berry 1988, Harding 1990c).

The Commission has produced a statement of intent which dealt with the points I have described earlier. In particular, it emphasised the following aspects:

- ◆ The need for a network of accredited local/regional records agencies and national thematic data centres;
- ◆ A national regulating agency for biological recording and a published register of accredited records agencies;
- ◆ Agreed standards for accuracy of data and protocols to ensure compatibility and common recording formats;
- ◆ Procedures for access to data;
- ◆ Security of funding to ensure continuity in the management of data.

To these ends, the Commission is currently seeking funding from the Department of the Environment and other government bodies to carry out a detailed review and feasibility study. If we are successful, the review should begin later this year. Watch this space!

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## 6

# SPECIES RECOVERY PROGRAMME

## Dagmar Junghanns.

The species recovery programme is a new project for English Nature, approved only last year by NCC Council (before the reorganisation of NCC). It has high priority, having been allocated 1/15 of the scientific budget.

The programme is based on a work by Dr. A. Whitten, who has analysed the status of all protected species in Britain (besides birds), and the reasons for species' decline. This has resulted in the drawing up of schedules of recovery for each species. A tremendous amount of consultation with organisations and experts has gone into this.

Protected species were analysed by:

- Distribution (past and present)
- Ecology
- Status in IUCN threat categories
- Recovery Goal and Prescription (with guidelines to achieve stabilisation and enhancement of each species' status, and guidelines on when a species is considered to be recovered.
- Management (eg site), species contingency (collecting seeds etc.), research requirements, translocation and reintroduction, monitoring and enforcement.

Implementation of species protection is carried out largely by English Nature at present, but it must also include other bodies. Threat, recovery potential and budget (how much money is needed to achieve the stability of the population) must also be considered, in analysing species for protection.

Species shortlisted for action this year include rough marsh mallow, strapwort, fringed gentian, ribbon-leaved water plantain, Plymouth pear, fen ragwort, limestone woundwort, cut-leaved germander, field cricket, fen raft spider, violet click beetle, lagoon sand worm.

Choosing a species from this list is difficult, for example, the field cricket has only 2 locations, so is a good candidate for action. rough marsh mallow, however, could be protected by regional action. Of the species shortlisted, field cricket, fen raft spider, cut leaved germander and rough marsh mallow occur in Sussex.

The concept of "making species less scarce" is more understandable than habitat loss, but attractive species receive more sympathy than others. In addition, there is a danger that resources will be drawn towards protecting these attractive species in isolation, rather than overall habitats. However, the project has great potential if the information is used carefully, and the systematic approach used can be applied to other species.

## Questions

Someone wanted to know if there is a database at HQ for species listed in the programme. DJ was not sure, but thought so.

The question of how species are selected for inclusion in the list of protected species was raised, and how and when new species are added to the list. Apparently there is a 5 yearly review of species on the list, and new species are added at this review. EN looks at all the data, records and recommendations after the review to reassess the status of each species, and decide whether there is any point in protecting them (eg some insects are rare, but virtually impossible to protect as they are difficult to locate and impossible to look after individually). EN then draws up a short list, which is passed on to the DoE. The final list is then selected by the DoE. Scheduling a species is therefore a very lengthy process. It is possible, but controversial, to deschedule species which have recovered, or which are not as rare as was thought.

## 7

**HEATHLAND MANAGEMENT PROJECT****Ann Griffiths, West Sussex County Council**

The Nature Conservation Strategy for West Sussex recently approved by the Planning and Coast Countryside Committees identified the need "to seek an improvement of nature conservation resources through site management and habitat creation". In particular reference was made to giving advice and grant aid in relation to "broad areas defined as of high nature conservation interest". One such area highlighted was the West Sussex Heathlands.

Lowland heathlands are now widely recognised as both a significant and threatened habitat of high nature conservation interest, important landscape character and local amenity value. Many heathlands are also registered commons with the associated rights of use. Public rights of way facilitate access to many sites. The following extract from a recent article in the Journal "British Wildlife", neatly summarises the situation:-

"Lowland heath is an extremely scarce habitat in both national and international contexts. Western Europe possibly contains less than 150,000ha, of which more than a third is in the UK. Once far more extensive, heaths have been reclaimed for agriculture, forestry and urban development. Most remaining areas are losing their wildlife value owing to the spread of bracken, *Pteridium aquilinum*, colonisation by rhododendron, birch and pine, and too-frequent fires, all resulting from the cessation of grazing and other traditional uses. Management is urgently necessary in order to maintain the range of conditions required by heathland wildlife, especially on isolated sites whose fauna is unlikely to recolonise once lost."

In West Sussex less than 1% of our total area is now represented by the heathland habitat. A high proportion of this remaining heath is under threat because of lack of management.

Various conservation bodies are already involved in site safeguarding and management work. Notable organisations involved include the County Council, the National Trust, the Sussex Wildlife Trust, the Royal Society for Protection of Birds, English Nature and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers. District and Parish Councils are also in the position of either land owner or land manager of heathland sites and can make a significant contribution to their conservation.

Iping Common Local Nature Reserve, managed jointly by West Sussex County Council and the Sussex Wildlife Trust is a good example of what can be achieved. Here management agreements and licences with the private landowners enable the otherwise fragmented site to be managed in a coherent way. Similarly Lavington Common, under the guardianship of the National Trust and the heathland area at Buchan Country Park are actively managed with nature conservation and amenity in mind. However, there are many other areas under private ownership which will lose their conservation and amenity value if nothing is done.

The management tasks required are often daunting for the private landowner needing both technical expertise and resources. At present the County Council provides an advisory service, offers limited grant aid to owners through its Conservation Budget and in some cases manages sites by agreement as at Hesworth Common.

It is proposed that the County Council formalises and extends its activity in this field by initiating a specific heathland project, similar to the work being undertaken in neighbouring counties. Within the Minor Projects budget provision for next year a sum of £4,900 is allocated for this project. As a result of the proposed changes to the countryside ranger service next year, it may be possible to place more emphasis on nature conservation and for a ranger to be involved in the development of the heathland project.

Those involved in heathland management in the county will be encouraged to join a Heathland Forum, under the chairmanship of the County Council. The Forum would include local authorities, conservation groups and public and private owners of heathland sites. The Forum would have the objective of assessing:

- whether present resources are being used in the most effective way (people, money and machinery, etc.)
- whether present resources are sufficient to achieve the management objectives on existing protected sites
- the next priorities for active conservation initiatives including the designation of further local nature reserves at County and District level.
- the need for further survey, research and monitoring
- the development of a demonstration project (with full interpretation) to encourage others to be involved.

The Forum will seek to implement a number of practical heathland management tasks on public and private land relating to nature conservation, interpretation and access, to include initially Chapel Common, Rogate and Hesworth Common, Fittleworth.

Such heathland management schemes will be overseen by the Forum. Grant aid support will be sought from English Nature and the Countryside Commission together with outside sponsorship and the involvement of the voluntary sector.

## 8

## GRASSLAND SURVEY IN EAST SUSSEX

## Graham Steven, English Nature

The work in East Sussex is part of a major NCC (now EN) project to survey the lowland grassland of Britain, using the National Vegetation Classification (NVC). Prior to Graham's work, very little information existed on grasslands in East Sussex. Sites for detailed survey were therefore selected using NCC Phase I data and aerial photographs, and over 1,000 were visited, with emphasis being placed on the High Weald area. Of these 1000 grasslands only 41 were still found to contain semi-natural vegetation.

A full Phase II survey was carried out on each of the 41 sites. This involved recording the presence and relative abundance of species within each vegetation community, using quadrats.

The majority of sites were found to be of NVC types MG5 - mesotrophic (neutral) grassland characterised by *Cynosurus cristatus* (crested dog's tail) and *Centaurea nigra* (black knapweed). Noteworthy species included *Ophioglossum vulgatum* (adderstongue fern) and *Rhinanthus minor* (yellow rattle).

More typical of the Weald was a more acid community, characterised by *Succisa pratensis* (Devil's bit scabious), *Danthonia decumbens* (heath grass) and *Genista tinctoria* (dyer's greenweed).

The rarest community was fen meadow, characterised by *Molinia caerulea* (purple moor-grass) and *Cirsium dissectum* (meadow thistle).

Of the 41 sites identified as being good quality grassland, 15 are of potential SSSI standard. East Sussex compared well with similar survey work done in Dorset. In total, 260ha (0.1% of County) is good quality grassland.

East Sussex appeared to have more unimproved grassland habitat than West Sussex, due to more traditional farming methods. Many sites had large old anthills, which implied no ploughing in recent years.

In all, the survey identified a far higher number of good grassland sites than anticipated, although these tend to be highly fragmented; of the 41 best sites, 70% are under 5ha.

#### Questions

The problem of tracing owners for access permission was raised. It was suggested that, since Graham had already contacted the farmers, and held ownership information, this could be passed on to other recorders so they could also survey the best sites for other groups, as old grasslands should be good for invertebrates, etc. GS was wary of this, due to confidentiality of information. Another suggestion was that the EN should be taking an active role in setting up further fieldwork - explaining to the landowner/tenant that a botanical survey is not enough, and other specialists need to look at the site before the survey is considered complete, and then directing the specialists to the sites most needing work. This idea could be followed up by the Biological Recorder's working group. ✓

## 9

## THE FUTURE

In this seminar we have been looking at how information can be collected together and organised so that better use can be made of it in the future. This is the main aim of the Environmental Survey Directory. The way that approaches in Sussex fit in with national biological recording has also been examined. Dr. Harding informed us that our approach towards organising and co-ordinating recording work is, in fact, quite advanced when compared to other counties.

The use of organised survey information has also been shown. The SNCI project illustrates how data can be brought together to make a persuasive case for the sympathetic treatment of valuable wildlife sites. The heathlands initiative is perhaps a more specific example of the same use. Also, of course, the day to day work of organisations like the Sussex Wildlife Trust, English Nature and the County Councils often requires comments on development proposals and the Environmental Survey Directory and SNCI projects are a vital tool in this respect. Many people - strategy producers, planners, developers and road builders, as well as individuals who are more academically inclined - are now coming to naturalists and ecologists for information. The ball is now in our court to ensure we can do this without compromising our objectives.

There has been considerable progress since last year, and I see this continuing, but there are considerable problems. The SNCI project will hopefully continue next year and start to cover East Sussex. The Environmental Survey Directory is gradually being refined and many records are being entered. Projects which make use of the data organisation may also be evolving. A main problem is funding. We are all working towards obtaining more resources, from a variety of organisations. The County Councils, English Nature and World Wide Fund for Nature have already supported our work, as have many of the District Councils. Over the next year we hope to attract the support of the remaining District Councils (many of which are keen, it's just that we have not formally approached them yet). To this end Dr. P Gay, Chairman of the Sussex Wildlife Trust Conservation Committee has written a letter to the chairman of all planning committees around the County informing them that this seminar has taken place and stressing the importance of our work. In particular Dr. Gay stresses that the system of networking information that we are evolving is of great value to planners and therefore asks them to consider supporting us financially. A copy of this letter is appended to these proceedings.

The organisation of biological recording in Sussex is, I think, improving. Yet, with such a changing situation it may sometimes be difficult for us to see where we are going. At the moment we have ideas, systems and directories but these are all incomplete and not yet being fully used. However, I have a vision of where I think we should be in a year or so's time. At that point our network should consist of the following elements:

- A biological recorders working group overseeing the networking of information.
- A directory of people - specialists in different groups or subjects, covering different areas.
- A usable Environmental Survey Directory which holds information on a large proportion of biological surveys covering Sussex.
- A growing network of Sites of Nature Conservation Importance, recognised by naturalists and accepted by planners and policy makers.
- The confidence of local naturalists and specialists in these systems, such that they are happy to make use of the information and provide an input, in terms of supplying data.