

THE SUSSEX RECORDER

**Proceedings from the
Biological Recorders' Seminar
held at
Singing Hills Golf Course
February 1995**

Compiled and edited by
Harry Montgomery

Sussex Wildlife Trust

Woods Mill

Henfield

West Sussex

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INTRODUCTION

Tony Whitbread

This was the sixth of our annual Biological Recorders' Seminars and once again the level of attendance, and interest, was very high. The venue this year was Singing Hills Golf Course and we are all indebted to them for providing an excellent venue. The other organisation which has helped greatly is English Nature. They have provided much of the funding to cover the staff time, and other administration costs associated with the Trust's work of biological recording.

The Seminar's agenda proved very interesting. Last year I talked briefly of a change of emphasis in conservation. Conserving and managing the best sites is now considered a basic (and essential) minimum. But we are now moving into an agenda where we are talking more of restoration, enhancement and rehabilitation. This begs the question - if we restore or enhance a habitat, how can we tell whether it has got better or not? And this is where species recording could become immensely helpful.

Hence one theme of today's conference is to look at how species recording can be used as a method of monitoring habitat quality. Furthermore, as sorting data for a variety of purposes (like habitat monitoring) is becoming still more important, it is now an opportune time to look at computer recording systems and how they can be of use to us.

Tony Whitbread
Sussex Wildlife Trust
Woods Mill
Henfield

THE SUSSEX ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEY DIRECTORY - AN UPDATE

Simon Curson

Progress in the Past Year

Six months were spent at West Sussex County Council putting all their relevant information on to the Directory. A leaflet has been prepared which explains what the Directory is and how best to use it, based on the existing, more detailed promotion booklet. This leaflet is directed at people who may wish to use the Directory, whereas the previous leaflet was directed more at people who may have information that could be added to the Directory.

Demonstrations of the Directory have been given to the Council members of the Trust and to the Planning Department of West Sussex County Council.

So now all relevant information at English Nature, West Sussex County Council and East Sussex County Council is on the Directory and information at the Trust is in the process of input, as well as various other information from other sources. 864 surveys covering over 3,100 sites are now on the Directory.

Recent Use of the Directory

Since the beginning of this year we have had 37 enquiries, an average of 19 per month compared with an average of 1 per month before 1995. The organisations on the steering group - English Nature, East Sussex County Council and West Sussex County Council - have also made extensive use of the Directory. A good example of its use is when the Trust used it in order to assess the conservation interest of land that was affected by the proposed new runway at Gatwick Airport. In one afternoon we were able to compile information on that area, which would normally have taken many days.

Simon Curson
Sussex Wildlife Trust
Woods Mill
Henfield

SITES OF NATURE CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE (SNCI) PROJECT IN EAST SUSSEX

Marion Finch

In previous years the SNCI team has reported back to the seminar by giving a summary of sites surveyed, and statistics on survey work still to be carried out. This year it seems more appropriate to give an overview of the project, putting it in its local and national context, and considering how it should be carried forward when the survey work is completed. I also want to discuss what I see as the philosophy behind the project, as this will have fundamental implications for its future.

Firstly, some brief statistics on progress so far.

Woodlands

Wealden:

24 surveyed, 4 pSNCIs selected. 26 pSNCIs selected from existing reports. 86 identified for survey.

Rother:

26 surveyed, 6 confirmed SNCIs, 1 being considered. 1 confirmed and 9 pSNCIs being considered from existing reports. 75 to be surveyed.

Meadows

Wealden:

21 surveyed, 3 pSNCIs selected. 27 pSNCIs selected from existing reports, 9 identified for survey.

Rother:

12 surveyed, 2 confirmed SNCIs, 2 being considered. 6 confirmed and 1 pSNCI from existing reports. 4 selected for survey.

Chalk grassland

Wealden:

10 pSNCIs selected from existing reports.

Heathland

Wealden:

4 pSNCIs selected from existing reports. 4 identified for survey.

Rother:

1 surveyed, now very overgrown.

Open Water

Wealden:

4 surveyed, 2 identified for survey.

Rother:

2 surveyed, both pSNCIs, 2 selected from existing reports, 3 to survey.

Other sites

Parklands, coastal sites, churchyards, etc. identified for survey.

I think it is important that we do not concentrate on these figures, but consider what the surveys represent. Although the project is based in Wealden and Rother Districts at present, it is an extension of the work which started in West Sussex, and which has also covered Hove and Lewes Districts in East Sussex. The survey techniques and site selection procedures are the same, as is the rationale behind the project. We are not, therefore, dealing with Wealden and Rother in isolation, but with most of the two counties of Sussex.

However, the true picture is even broader. Similar surveys, using similar methodology, are being carried out over much of Britain. Although they are independent, many have been initiated by, or have involved, the county Wildlife Trusts. As a result, the national office of the Wildlife Trusts has been able to compile statistics on the various projects, and produce a handbook which describes best practice and an approach to management, amongst other themes. This is in line with the national strategy being developed for these sites by the Wildlife Trusts. The methodology used in East and West Sussex is compatible with the best practice recommended in the handbook and used by many of the surveys, which means that there is the potential for sharing and comparing data on a national scale. If the handbook's recommendations for standardising the system are adopted, we could have a national network of sites to complement statutory SSSIs. If this is combined with adopting a universal name, such as the suggested Wildlife Sites, I feel the whole system would gain credence and strength, with important implications for attracting funding and protecting individual sites.

Surveying and selecting sites is only part of the story. They need to be protected and managed, and the handbook recommends that this is done not only through the planning system, but also through the land owners. This approach is already being undertaken in West Sussex, as you know from previous reports by Graham Roberts of West Sussex County Council, but needs to be expanded to cover all SNCIs. I feel that the current economic climate will persuade even farmers uncommitted, or opposed to conservation ideals, to work with us if payments and advice are sufficient. Many farmers are already interested. We must, therefore, push for proper funding and support so that this vital work can continue after the survey phase is completed.

Finally, I would like to consider the philosophy behind the SNCI system, as I see it. SNCIs represent the very best of our countryside, other than nationally important SSSIs. However, as it is impossible to survey the whole of a county, they are only a sample, set against a background of often unknown wildlife potential. This observation does not reflect on their individual importance, or the need to protect and manage them, but rather indicates broader roles for the SNCI system. For one thing, the sites can act as standards against which other areas can be judged. For another, they can be used as indicators of the health and integrity of the natural systems that surround us. They can be used to monitor the success (or otherwise) of protective measures, or the effectiveness of conservation management. However, I would like to conclude with the thought that, even if we have a well protected and superbly managed system of SNCIs, we have not achieved local or international conservation aims unless these standards are reflected in the whole environment.

Marion Finch
Sussex Wildlife Trust
Woods Mill
Henfield

A RARE SPECIES INVENTORY

Paul Harmes

The Rare Species Inventory is being compiled by Harry Montgomery, and the information stored on computer. The information concerns rare and endangered species within the county.

As an extension to the project it is proposed to produce a series of publications based on the National Red Data Book series.

The first of these books is to cover the vascular plants, bryophytes and lichens, and is to be compiled by Mary Briggs and Paul Harmes, the BSBI (Botanical Society of the British Isles) vice-county recorders for East and West Sussex.

It is envisaged that the book will be a valuable conservation tool, giving an insight into the status of our more vulnerable plant species within Sussex. To this end, the criteria for inclusion in the book will be different from Harry's computer list, which includes historical data.

We propose to include all plants that qualify for:

- 1) The National Red Data Book 2 - plants occurring in less than 16 10km squares in Britain;
- 2) The Scarce Plants Atlas - plants occurring in more than 15, and less than 100, 10km squares in Britain;
- 3) County rarities - plants occurring in fewer than 4 sites in each vice-county;
- 4) Presumed extinct.

All data for categories 1, 2 and 3 will be post 1986, in line with the BSBI monitoring scheme and the proposed Atlas 2000 project.

We hope this will give a concise and up-to-date picture of the plants that are threatened in Sussex. The whole project is being overseen by Dr. Tony Whitbread, the Trust's Conservation Officer.

Paul Harmes, BSBI County Recorder
Portslade
East Sussex

LOWER PLANT SURVEYS IN SUSSEX

Simon Davey

The aim of this talk is to enthuse the audience about the lower plants, specifically lichens and bryophytes, which occur in Sussex. It is probable that many have only a passing acquaintance with lower plants, though they may have noticed the orange patches of *Xanthoria parietina* growing on garage roofs.

Lichens are very important as indicators of continuity of habitat. The amount of truly ancient woodland in Sussex is confined to a handful of mediaeval deer parks; however there are woodlands of importance of lesser age, and the barnacle lichen *Thelotrema lepadinum* is an excellent indicator of these.

The 'orchids' of the lichen world belong to the family Stictaceae. Out of a British flora of thirteen species, three currently occur in Sussex. These are *Sticta limbata* (one tree in East Dean Woods), *Lobaria virens* and *Lobaria pulmonaria*. The latter two species are now totally confined to mediaeval deer parks.

Lichens and bryophytes are most important as indicators in woodland, where they are also used to estimate air pollution levels. Some, such as *Teloschistes flavicans*, are so sensitive that they are confined to the western extremities of the British Isles. However, it is very likely that it occurred in Sussex in former times.

Lower plants are important in Sussex as indicators of very ancient turf on the Downs. This habitat is well represented in Sussex. As with woodland, downland habitat has to be very ancient in order to be rich. Iron Age trackways, such as that near the Trundle west of Goodwood, are fine examples. The best in Sussex however appears to be Deep Dean in East Sussex. Although invasion by *Viburnum* is a problem, the lower plants occurring on soil, amongst dead mosses, on flints or on chalk nodules are of national importance. The speaker threw down the challenge of re-finding the lichen *Aspicilia tuberculosa*, a lichen occurring on downland flints which has been extinct in Britain since the last century.

Lichens and mosses are also important and very varied in coastal habitats. The lichen *Tornabea scutellifera* is a large, bushy species which occurred on cliffs and on the ground east of Hastings but has not been seen since the mid 19th century. As large quantities are present in various British herbaria, it seems quite likely that a concerted effort would result in its re-finding.

Sussex churchyards are among the finest in the British Isles for lower plants, and nowhere are they better than in an area centred on Stopham and Pulborough. These form attractive, or rather obscure, patches on the walls of the church and on memorials. The finest churchyard in Sussex is Stopham, where the current lichen list stands at 116 species.

Many of the scarce lower plants in Sussex occur in fragile habitats of very great antiquity. They are therefore important as indicators of habitats where species in other groups may well occur. Many of the sites are now reduced to a few square metres. It is very important that these are listed and conserved if the lower plant richness of our counties is to be maintained.

Reference: Atlas of Sussex Mosses, Liverworts and Lichens, by F. Rose et al. Published Booth Museum of Natural History.

Simon Davey, Ecological Consultant
Ditchling
East Sussex

COMPUTER RECORDING SYSTEMS

Mike Thurner

Products

Thurner Automation has developed a number of software linking packages. Software products are licensed for a single location and are supplied with full user documentation. A general description of each product is available on request.

RECORDER to DMAP Link

To link RECORDER with Dr. Alan Morton's DMAP and DMAP for Windows mapping packages so that high quality maps can be produced from RECORDER data directly or via export to DTP. The Windows version calls RECORDER and the linking procedures from Windows icons. The package is in use by many County Wildlife Trusts, Local Authorities and individuals.

DOS version	Product code R2DD.	Licence fee £35.
Windows version	Product code R2DW.	Licence fee £45.

RECORDIT to RECORDER Link

To link RECORDER with Michael Weideli's RECORDIT mollusc recording database. Thurner Automation also offers a customising service to configure RECORDIT for use with other taxa groups. RECORDIT may then be used as a low-cost data capture satellite to a master RECORDER centre.

Linking software	Product cost R2R. (Only one copy required for a group of satellites.)	Licence fee £45.
Customising service	£35 per taxa group.	

LEVANA to RECORDER Link

To link RECORDER with Jim Asher's LEVANA butterfly/moth recording database permitting RECORDER to capture a copy of the data entered onto LEVANA without the need for re-punching.

Linking software	Product code L2R.	Licence fee £45.
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LEVANA to DMAP Link

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PC COREDATA/BATDATA to DMAP Link

To link the old version PLOT5 output from these packages with Dr. Alan Morton's DMAP for Windows mapping packages with the benefits outlined for the RECORDER to DMAP link.

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Data Transfer Services

RECORDER to RECORDER Link

Thurner Automation has specified rules and has implemented systems of transferring data from satellite RECORDER installations to a master, and of sharing data between peer level systems.

Data Import to RECORDER from other Databases

Thurner Automation offers data transfer services on a project basis. They have developed a tool kit of programs useful in the manipulation and re-coding of biological data so that it may be imported into RECORDER following export from existing computer databases.

These techniques have been applied to projects including complete County Wildlife Trust databases, Ancient Woodland Inventory data, spider survey data, Odonata data from several sources and BSBI records.

Studies have been undertaken of the means of importing data into master RECORDER systems from a variety of sources including co-operative neighbouring organisations, Local Authority databases and specialised species recording groups.

Training

Thurner Automation has been delivering public and custom RECORDER user training on behalf of the Surrey Wildlife Trust under contract from RSNC and now offers custom RECORDER training at user's premises based on the following modules:

- * Recorder Basics
- * Data Entry
- * Report Generation
- * System Manager Functions
- * AREV Basics
- * Advanced Reporting
- * Data Sharing
- * Mapping

Support

Mike Thurner is a computer professional with an interest and insight into wildlife conservation and biological recording. He has been using RECORDER since October 1989 (version 2.2) and has lived through upgrades to 2.21, 3.0, 3.1 and 3.2. He has been using AREV for this and other database applications. He has supported the Surrey Wildlife Trust installation since its purchase, and has helped greatly in enabling the effective use of RECORDER in the Sussex Wildlife Trust. He has delivered UK wide support for RECORDER for six months on behalf of the Surrey Wildlife Trust under contract from EN/RSNC. He has developed several local custom extensions to the basic RECORDER package.

Telephone support is included in the price of all products supplied by Thurner Automation.

Mike Thurner
Thurner Automation
Littleton Farmhouse
Littleton, Guildford, GU3 1HW

HABITAT QUALITY INDICATORS AND CONSERVATION TARGETS

Tony Whitbread

Two of the remaining papers look at the use of species as quality indicators for habitats. This aspect of species recording will, I believe, become even more important to conservation organisation in the future. As well as trying to conserve the sites that are already of high quality, we are now also trying to enhance degraded areas, or even recreate habitats which could be restored.

When thinking about re-creation and enhancement we need to address two main issues: what do we want and how do we know if we are getting there?

Consequently, if we accept that our environmental assets are currently too low (problems of species loss, habitat fragmentation and habitat simplification all suggest that they are), then we need to set targets in order to guide improvement. In conservation we have been very good at criticising loss but we have not been good at saying what we actually want! I think that we now need to spell this out - for example, roughly how much woodland should be restored to traditional management or how much of our flood plains should be grazing marsh?

The second half of the equation is to find methods of determining whether our actions are in fact resulting in progress towards our targets or not. Again, conservationists have not always been good at this. We may monitor the effectiveness of a management plan by, for example, seeing whether the coppice cycle is on track. However, how often do we check whether achieving the management plan actually provides the conservation gains that we aim for? Therefore, along with conservation targets, we must also set the quality measures that we are now talking about.

This is the subject of a forthcoming Sussex Wildlife Trust publication, "A Vision for the Wildlife of Sussex". This will be a rather full document which will explain the need for a better future for our environment, will detail conservation targets for the county and will list species (and perhaps other attributes) which can be used to assess progress towards targets. Part of the document will also be a call for action - the Vision will not only be a set of things that the SWT (or conservationists as a whole) should do, but will also include things that we feel need to be done by a whole range of different people - ie. we will be targeting particular organisations to deliver particular aspects of the Vision.

At the moment we are at the first stages. We have ideas on targets and we are developing ideas on quality indicators. For example, Joyce Gay has provided information on butterflies for various habitats, Frank Penfold has listed plants for neutral meadows and Mike Edwards has helped with bees and wasps. Simon Davey is currently working on lower plants and several other specialists are developing their thinking in this direction.

The next two papers address this subject in different ways, as illustrations. The first will show how aquatic beetles might be helpful and gives a good example of putting theory into practice. The second gives a more general background to quality indicators - talking us through what a Curriculum Vitae for such an organism might look like.

Tony Whitbread
Sussex Wildlife Trust
Woods Mill
Henfield

THE USE OF WATER BEETLES AS INDICATORS OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Peter Hodge

It has been argued that the number of predatory invertebrates present at any site is an important indicator of environmental quality, and most water beetles are predatory.

About ten years ago a team of freshwater entomologists, led by Dr. Garth Foster, considered using water beetles for environmental assessment of wetland sites. Each species of water beetle was given a score of between 1 and 32 according to rarity. A score of one is used for very common species, and 32 for those rarest and most endangered. The scores rise in a geometric progression (ie. 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32).

The points scored for all species of water beetles found in an aquatic site are added together. This total is known as the 'WET'. Next the number of species present is calculated. This is known as the 'NOS'.

A species quality score (SQS) is now calculated for the site by dividing the WET by the NOS, ie:
$$SQS = \frac{WET}{NOS}$$

A rough guide to the richness of a site can be gained by studying the above analysis. An aggregate of points (WET) of 100 or more indicates a top site. In order to attain such a score the site must contain quite a few rare species. A site with an SQS of more than 2.0 generally indicates good habitat quality. However, sites with very few species can have a high SQS due to the chance occurrence of one or more high scoring species.

Some uses of this scoring system are as follows:

- Sites which are regularly monitored can be compared for their quality from year to year. The reduction in one or more of the indices could serve as an early warning of something going wrong.
- Sites which are ecologically similar can be ranked with each other. This is rather a complicated process and requires the use of two computer programs called DECORANDA and TWINSPAN.
- The presence or absence of all species recorded from a site over a number of years can also give a useful guide to improving or declining habitat quality.

Peter Hodge, Consultant Entomologist
Ringmer
Lewes
East Sussex

INDICATOR SPECIES

Rob Cooke

Indicator species are currently fashionable (and politically correct; Biodiversity Action Plan, Biodiversity Challenge 2). They enable organisations to evaluate how habitats/sites are behaving without undergoing the expense of a full survey. They are cost effective.

An indicator species is more likely to elicit public support if it is endearing (dormouse) or has an interesting English name (adder's tongue fern, snake's head fritillary, silver spotted skipper). Habitat and vegetation types (unimproved chalk grassland, ancient semi-natural woodland) tend to be dry and scientific, and meaningless to non-naturalists. Public acceptance and encouragement is critical in securing funds and political support for nature conservation.

Indicator species therefore need to be consistent and predictable in where they occur and the way in which they respond. At least some should have 'cute and cuddly' English names.

Once a good indicator species has been selected it can be used to show:

- the extent of a particular habitat type;
- the quality of the habitat;
- the effectiveness of management.

There follows an outline of an ideal CV of an indicator species.

The CV of an indicator species, or what it takes to be one

NAME	Should have an English one, which is memorable.
ADDRESS	It needs one. Indicator species must be faithful to a particular habitat. A species of no fixed abode is no good as an indicator species.
ATTRIBUTES	<p>The species must be capable of responding. If it is in terminal decline, or will not colonise if conditions are correct, then the species will not make a good indicator. The species selected should not be rare, as declines would then be difficult to pick up before it is too late. Similarly it should not be so common that any increases are not obvious.</p> <p>The species selected should be reasonably easy to identify - bramble species are no good! If a species is to be successful then it needs to be widely adopted and looked for. Many of the people undertaking this will be non-specialists. Also survey and monitoring techniques should be straightforward.</p> <p>Indicator species can be 'baddies' as well as 'goodies'. For example, birch on a heathland site is a negative feature, but it is still a good indicator of the quality of the habitat and its management, albeit in a negative sense. When the list of indicator species is selected it is essential to state what the species is indicative of, and how it should be interpreted.</p>

The preferences and habitat requirements of the species should be reasonably well understood. For a species to be a successful indicator species there must be some expectation of a response.

We also need to know what is causing a response - it is important to know whether or not it is directly related to management, or whether the species is reacting to uncontrolled external events.

Indicator species must be consistent in their response within the entire geographical area in which they are to be used. If indicators vary in their response then we will not know what it is they are indicating!

Species should be 'gregarious'. Indicator species are much stronger tools if there are a suite of them to be monitored.

REFEREES

The species adopted as indicators should have the support of a range of organisations including both statutory and voluntary bodies. If conclusions about habitat quality are to be based on indicator species then everyone must be convinced of the suitability of that species to indicate change.

The species should also have the support of the scientific community. Ideally autecological accounts should be readily available within the published literature (Biological Flora of the British Isles, etc.).

Rob Cooke
English Nature
The Old Candlemakers
West Street
Lewes

A HISTORY OF FARM DIVERSIFICATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATURE RESERVE AT ELMS FARM, ICKLESHAM

John Willsher

1985

Farm purchased by Stephen Rumsey - 320 acres (129 hectares) in total, comprising 200 acres of High Weald soil type, ie. mixed clays and fine Ashdown sands, and 100 acres of badly drained marine clay.

Previous farming type was mixed dairy plus arable and potatoes. Dairy quota was not available to us.

1986

Arable crops and early potatoes.

1987

Marshland fields not ideally suited to arable crops - they flood in winter! Limited experimentation with drain modification to produce permanent flooding, with the help of springs.

1988

Three fields permanently flooded, a year too early to qualify for set-aside. Diversification - asparagus bed planted in upper small fields.

1989

First year of MAFF set-aside scheme. More marshland taken out of production; water and fringe habitat now developing rapidly. MAFF payments received on this land but not that flooded before the critical year of 1988. Breeding bird population dramatically rising. Bird ringing studies in autumn show how important such habitat is for migratory birds.

1989 - 1993

Continued regeneration of natural marshland habitat on set-aside and other flooded land.

1993

Entered agreement with Countryside Commission to manage all marshland fields under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme with special capital project to construct a 'scrape' for wading birds, with a hide for public use. Area is now an SSSI and part of Rye-Dungeness proposed Ramsar SPA. Plans to extend reserve up valley, neighbour joins Stewardship Scheme. Threat from Icklesham road scheme.

1994 - 1995

'Scrape' now completed, and reserve now comprises 100 acres. List of birds seen now stands at 222 species, and breeding bird numbers are greatly increased. Up to 10 Schedule 1 species bred or attempted to breed. Common birds census was done in early years but unfortunately was not continued. I hope it can be restarted this year.

A postgraduate of Sussex University is working on the sedge warbler. She has also done some insect trapping, and plant species in the study area have also been listed. A plant list was produced by Breda Burt in 1988 for part of the area. 380 species of moth have been recorded by Ian Hunter.

Electrofishing by NRA is sometimes carried out in winter to remove pike. Good numbers of rudd, tench and eels have been found, but there has been no serious study of the fish.

We are also decidedly lacking in study of other fields not mentioned, eg. in the deep dykes and shallower lagoons. It would be interesting to know how the insect life of water and mud in the new scrape develops.

Not much is known about the mammals, but harvest mouse and possibly water shrew are present. Regular mink trapping is carried out. The water vole could possibly be re-introduced.

RECORDER was installed recently; we are still learning how to use it!

Help with recording species on the reserve would be very welcome.

John Willsher
Farm Manager
Elms Farm
Icklesham

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