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SURVEY OF LOCAL & REGIONAL BIOLOGICAL RECORDS CENTRES

- ANALYSIS OF RESULTS -

by

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The Biological Records Centre (I.T.E., Monks Wood) and the Biology Curators Group collaborated in 1980 to compile an inventory of local and regional Biological Record Centres in the United Kingdom. A questionnaire was designed and circulated to all known records centres in September 1980 (BCG Newsletter, Vol. 2, No. 8). The last replies to the questionnaire were received in February 1981.

The questionnaire was sent to seventy-four centres, and replies were received from, or on behalf of, sixty-seven of these. Sixty centres are currently operating, are expected to be operational in 1981 or 1982, or are under active consideration. These centres were listed in our earlier paper (BCG Newsletter, Vol. 2, No. 10) giving details of addresses, areas of coverage, telephone numbers, dates when centres were set up and names of persons to contact.

The questionnaires from 59 of these centres have been analysed; the remaining replies contained too little information to warrant inclusion. All results are expressed here as a percentage of the 59 centres whose replies were analysed, unless indicated otherwise. However, replies from many centres did not include answers to all questions but no figures for nil returns are given in the following analysis.

Inventory of Local and Regional Biological Record Centres 1980

A total of 59 centres responded with replies that could be answered.

All results expressed as a percentage of the total number of centres responding unless indicated otherwise.

1. Staffing of Record Centres

Record centres with permanent staff.	81%
Record centres with permanent staff with or without other duties.	47%
Record centres with permanent staff with or without other duties and employing temporary staff in addition.	7%
Record centres with permanent staff with or without other duties and using volunteers in addition.	25%
Record centres with permanent staff with or without other duties and in addition employing both temporary and voluntary staff.	2%
Record centres employing temporary staff only.	0%
Record centres without permanent staff.	19%
Record centres using volunteers only.	12%
Record centres without staff of any kind.	7%
Record centres where permanent staff have job descriptions mentioning work in the Record Centre.	49%
Record centres where temporary staff have job descriptions mentioning work in the Record Centre.	8%

2. Funding of Record Centres

Record centres with Central Government funding.	4%
Record centres with Local Authority funding.	81%
Record centres with Manpower Services Commission funding only.	10%
Record centres with University funding.	5%
Other record centres receiving funding from:	
local societies	3%
The Field Studies Council	2%
The Nature Conservancy Council	2%
County Naturalists Trusts	3%

Numerous record centres receive additional finance from the Manpower Services Commission. No funding of any kind is given to 3% of record centres.

3. Format of Data held by Record Centres

Record Centres holding species records 89%

Record Centres holding site files 81%

Record Centres holding species records use the following grid square units:-

10 km	17%
5 km	2%
2 km	20%
1 km	24%

61% of Record Centres contain a total of 2,544,000 species records - average of 70,666/centre.

63% of Record Centres contain data on 21,182 sites with an average of 572 sites per centre. However, not included in these figures are two centres who stated they had information on 30,000 and 40,000 sites respectively.

4. Handling of Data

Record Centres using manual systems. 98%

Record Centres using mechanical systems. 3%

Record Centres using a mini-computer. 0%

Record Centres having access to a computer which they may or may not use. 7%

5. Control of Quality of Data

Record Centres having records assessed by an expert. 81%

Record Centres not having records assessed by an expert. 14%

Number of groups served by a local expert at Record Centres. average 12

Record Centres ensuring voucher specimens kept in a Museum. 86%

Record Centres not ensuring voucher specimens kept in a Museum. 10%

6. Main Sources of Data

a. Local Naturalists and Societies

Level of Importance	1	2	3	4	5	6
% of Record Centres	41	34	5	8	3	0

b. Records Centre Staff

Level of importance	1	2	3	4	5	6
% of Record Centres	44	22	15	2	2	3

c. National Biological Recording Schemes

Level of Importance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
% of Record Centres	0	3	3	17	25	10	2

d. Biological Records Centre

Level of Importance	1	2	3	4	5	6
% of Record Centres	0	2	7	14	17	22

e. Local Museums

Level of Importance	1	2	3	4	5	6
% of Record Centres	7	7	17	14	8	8

f. Published Sources

Level of Importance	1	2	3	4	5	6
% of Record Centres	5	17	29	10	10	5

Other sources of data include the Nature Conservancy Council (14% of Centres), Universities (5% of Centres), Local Authority Planning Departments, The National Trust, research workers, students and other visitors.

Note the highest level of importance is denoted by category 1.

7. Use of Past Records

a. Publications

Record Centres abstracting data	69%
Record Centres not abstracting data	27%

b. Museum Collections

Record Centres abstracting data	61%
Record Centres not abstracting data	34%

c. Local Naturalists supplying past records

Record Centres obtaining records	68%
Record Centres not obtaining records	24%

8. Input of Data

Record Centres Receiving species records in 1979	39%
Average/centre	4460
Record Centres Receiving site files in 1979	47%
Average/centre	107
Record Centres with site files containing at least one comprehensive list for one taxonomic group	44%
Average No. of site files/centre	201
Record Centres with site files containing a full ecological description.	39%
Average No. of files/centre	23

9. Relationship with Biological Records Centre (BRC)

Record centres having abstracted records from BRC.	29%
Record centres never having abstracted records from BRC.	59%
Record centres considering abstracting records from BRC.	25%
Record centres supplying BRC with records on a regular basis.	22%
Record centres supplying BRC with records occasionally.	10%
Record centres which have not supplied BRC with records.	58%

Records for the following groups were most frequently mentioned in this section:

vascular plants, Lepidoptera, Amphibia and reptiles, Mammals, non-marine Mollusca.

10. Relationship with National Biological Recording Schemes

Record centres having asked schemes to supply records.	46%
Record centres having received records from schemes.	39%
Record centres never having asked schemes for records.	44%
Record centres regularly supplying <u>at least one</u> scheme with records.	46%
Record centres not supplying schemes with records.	42%

Of the record centres that had received records for schemes, 74% commented that the definition of the records was often too coarse to be of great use to centres interested in "site" records.

11. Users of Record Centres

User Group	% of Record Centres			
	Frequent	Regular	Occasional	Never
Local Authority Planners and Ecologists	12	15	39	19
Local Water Authority	0	2	27	53
County Naturalists Trust	24	10	32	12
Nature Conservancy Council	17	14	41	10
National Trust	0	3	10	66
Local Natural History Societies	12	15	34	24
Local Naturalists	15	27	34	5

21% of Record Centres cite 'others' as users of the data held and included Researchers, Educationalists, Land Agents and the Ministry of Agriculture amongst others.

12. Access to Data held by Record Centres

- a. Record Centres open to all enquirers
(except confidential data) 42%
- b. Record Centres allowing access to some enquirers only 44%
- c. Record Centres available only to official users 2%
- d. Record centres allowing landowners open access to data
relating to their own property (in combination with a. or b.
above) 12%

13. Interpretation of Information Supplied

- a. Record Centres always providing some form of interpretation 15%
- b. Record Centres sometimes providing some form of interpretation 61%
- c. Record Centres never providing some form of interpretation 10%

14. Evaluation of Sites

Record Centres evaluating sites	a. In the county	61%
	b. In the surrounding region (sometimes less than a county)	37%
Record Centres not evaluating sites	a. In the county	29%
	b. In the surrounding region (sometimes less than a county)	51%

15. Number of Enquiries

During a period of 12 months 71% of the Record Centres answered an average of 61 enquiries. This level of activity ranged from no enquiries for three centres to 500 for one centre.

16. Contact with Record Centres for other disciplines

Contact was made by Local Biological Record Centres with centres for other disciplines as follows:-

Local History	34%
Archaeology	49%
Industrial Archaeology	31%
Geology	63%
Other Disciplines (meteorology, rural life)	3%

17. Publications

A newsletter of some kind was produced by 29% of Record Centres.

Formaldehyde

There has been some concern recently about the possible carcinogenic properties of formaldehyde, following experiments on some animals in the United States. The Health and Safety Executive has sent us the following statement (13 February 1981):

1 Formaldehyde is a known irritant

and sensitiser. It is a known mutagen when tested in several systems. Two studies have recently been carried out in the United States, both relating to the possible carcinogenicity of formaldehyde.

2 The evidence from these recent studies indicates that at higher levels of exposure formaldehyde causes nasal cancer in animals. There is at present no epidemiological evidence to associate exposure to formaldehyde with the occurrence of cancer in humans.

3 Formaldehyde will shortly be reviewed by the Health and Safety Commission's Advisory Committee on Toxic Substances which will make appropriate recommendations.

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