

## STAFFORDSHIRE ECOLOGICAL RECORD

### DATA AND DATA ACCESS POLICY

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#### **Partners:**

Cannock Chase District Council, East Staffordshire Borough Council, Lichfield District Council, The National Forest Company, National Trust, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, South Staffordshire Council, Stafford Borough Council, Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, West Midlands Bird Club

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## 1 DATA CAPTURE AND MANAGEMENT

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Staffordshire Ecological Record manages and disseminates environmental data, providing an information service for the whole of the ceremonial county of Staffordshire (covering the same area as that of Staffordshire County Council plus the City of Stoke-on-Trent).

All taxonomic records used in our reporting are stored in a Recorder 6 (R6) database.

### 1.2 DATA FORMAT

We will accept biological records in any format, on the proviso that the data received conform to, or ideally exceed, the standards described in 2.2 Use of Metadata. Recorders will be encouraged to use more efficient capture methods where possible but not at the expense of recorder engagement.

### 1.3 DATA TRANSCRIPTION

Records received will usually be transcribed by SER staff into a format that is suitable for import into the Recorder 6 database. An Excel template with all necessary fields is used as the basis for this transcription, a distinction is made between fields that are necessary and those that are desirable. The exceptions to this are individual or small sets of records where it is more convenient and efficient to use the R6 species entry tool.

Records will be transcribed verbatim. Data deficiencies will be queried with the original recorder wherever possible.

### 1.4 DATA CONFIDENCE

In order to provide confidence that the information within SER's taxonomic database is as reliable as possible, SER operates a validation and verification policy. See 2 Validation and Verification for more information.

### 1.5 PRIORITISATION

Although the intent is to have records imported into the R6 as soon as possible after they are received greater emphasis is put on records of protected and/or designated species or records from designated sites. The same applies to newer records and those conforming to the standards referred to in 2.2. SER reserves the right to prioritise the importation of records to the R6 database in accordance with any agreements it may have with its partners.

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## 1.6 CONFIDENTIAL AND SENSITIVE RECORDS

Sensitive records are usually those records where the recorder (or recording group) does not wish the precise location of the record to be disclosed. These records will be held in the database at full geographic resolution but disseminated at a lower resolution as defined by the data supplier. Where information on these species is withheld (e.g. through use of coarser spatial referencing) those receiving the records will be notified.

## 1.7 ARCHIVE

After import all the original documents – digital files or scans of recording sheets as well as associated photographs – are archived in order that they can be examined if veracity of a reported record is queried. Original paper records are archived at the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery.

## 1.8 DISTRIBUTION AND COUNTY STATUS

The distribution of species in Staffordshire, and their County Status are to be based solely on records held by SER or its recognised County Recorder network. Records not supplied to SER are not included in any Species Alert systems used within the County Council or the local authorities and SER is unable to support any decisions made using data not held within the SER database.

# 2 VALIDATION AND VERIFICATION

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Because SER receives its records from a wide variety of sources, it is essential that SER can use these data in the knowledge that the information is correct, both spatially (i.e. where the record was made) and taxonomically (the species is correctly identified).

To this end, the following is a set of guidelines to be used in assessing the validity or veracity of any record supplied to SER. Any record failing to comply with the following guidelines will be noted as 'Requires Confirmation' within the Recorder database, or under certain circumstances as 'Known Incorrect'.

SER reserves the right to omit unverified records from any reports or outputs it may produce.

## 2.2 USE OF METADATA

Metadata is a descriptive summary of a 'thing'. In the case of the NBN, metadata is likely to describe a set of biological data, but this may not always be the case. The NBN standard is based upon the discovery level metadata model identified by the National Geospatial Data Framework (NGDF). The NBN standard is based upon editorial guidance specifically tailored to define the level of contextual information necessary to describe a wildlife data resource.

SER has based its requirements for individual records on the above, selecting those elements which are equally relevant to both the metadata and the individual records.

SER Minimum requirements for new records:

- A recognised species name, preferably including the scientific binomial, unless the common name is standardised (e.g. moths from the Bradley & Fletcher checklist).
- A name for the locality, if the locality does not have a name, or the name is not marked on at least 1:10,000 maps, then the locality should also include reference to a name marked on the 1:10,000 map (e.g. east of Wolseley Bridge).
- A grid reference of at least 1km precision, preferably 100m. Tetrad data is not used in the creation of the Species Alert System, so should be avoided.
- A precise date, preferably accurate to the day, but for priority species it should at least be accurate to the year. For critical species the season can be an essential part in determining the accuracy of the identification (e.g. flight periods in certain insects).
- A named observer, and identifier if this is different.

## 2.3 VALIDATION OF RECORDS

The validation of records ensures that (1) the computerised records held by SER accurately portray the original record supplied by the observer and (2) confirms the ancillary information (location, date, etc.) is correct.

Recorder 6 includes a number of inbuilt validation routines, including date and grid reference checking to ensure only genuine dates are entered and that the grid reference is in the correct area, however, this is not the case with all recording packages. SER takes reasonable steps to use a Geographic Information System to confirm supplied grid references.

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## 2.4 VERIFICATION OF RECORDS

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### 2.4.1 FIRST COUNTY RECORDS

All new First County Records (FCRs) must conform to the National Biodiversity Network's (NBN) minimum data standard and the record supplied to SER. All FCRs must then be confirmed by a recognised UK expert in the taxon and a voucher specimen (where feasible) lodged with the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery. Where no voucher specimen exists, or it is not permissible to collect one, photographic evidence may be acceptable at the discretion of the national expert.

Historical FCRs are accepted with the details supplied on the grounds that these can no longer be verified by any of the above procedures.

All new locality records should be confirmed by the local county recorder where this is feasible, otherwise a specimen should be lodged with the Museum and a national expert contacted for further advice. Again photographic evidence may be acceptable. Records from a known population may be accepted with proof that the recorder can identify the said taxon, or has supplementary evidence supporting the record.

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### 2.4.2 RECORDS OF RARE AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

All records of national notable or Red Data Book (RDB) species must conform to the National Biodiversity Network's minimum data standard (see 2.2) and the record supplied to SER.

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### 2.4.3 SPECIAL GROUPS

The verification of vascular plants and birds are already controlled by stringent guidelines produced by the Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI) and the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) respectively.

Any records requiring verification in these taxa will be passed by SER to the relevant local contact for subsequent processing. SER will then abide by their decision.

- Vascular Plants – contact BSBI County Recorder, address held by SER
- Birds – contact West Midland Bird Club, address held by SER

## 3 DATA SECURITY

### 3.1 LEGISLATION

SER is fully compliant with the relevant terms of the Data Protection Act 1998, through its host organisation Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.

### 3.2 DATA OWNERSHIP AND COPYRIGHT

The SER recognises the intellectual property rights of individual recorders and data suppliers who have played a role in collating and databasing records, or in the case where records have been collected for commercial gain with the contractor or client.

Reports and publications produced by SER using this data will be the property and copyright of SER with acknowledgement being given to the original recorder.

### 3.3 LOCAL BACKUP

The R6 database (and all other SER files) is backed up locally twice a week by the host organisation's backup procedures. R6 provides functionality to restore from a backup which would, in the case of loss of the database, allow a swift resumption of normal workflow.

### 3.2 REMOTE BACKUP

Backups of SER data are taken offsite and stored by the host organisation's computer staff once a week

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## 4 ACCESS TO DATA

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Staffordshire Ecological Record (SER) has been established as a service for local authorities, consultancies, educational establishments and the general public to supply information about the biology and geology of Staffordshire. SER is partially funded by a consortium comprising most of the local authorities in Staffordshire, however, this does not cover all costs incurred by the centre. As a result it is necessary for SER to charge for work it undertakes.

### 4.2 CHARGING FOR ACCESS TO DATA

Charging by SER is kept to a minimum and wherever possible enquiries are free of charge to the following clients:

- “Not-for-profit” enquiries of a reasonable<sup>1</sup> size, including the general public, educational establishments & students and local natural history groups.
- All enquiries from any of the funding partners<sup>2</sup> (see 4.4 Access to data for partners).
- Enquirers supplying data to SER may also be eligible for charges to be either waived or discounted.

Unless there are exceptional circumstances, all other enquiries are chargeable at the following rates.

#### CHARGING RATES

- £60 for the first ½ hour or part thereof
- £40 for the second ½ hour or part thereof
- £50 for each additional hour or part thereof

Additional services (laminating, etc.) will be decided at the time of quotation

<sup>1</sup> Enquiries which take a large amount of SER resources in time or materials are not deemed reasonable, and a charge may be levied on this type of enquiry.

<sup>2</sup> Except where the call upon SER's time and resources in any calendar year is disproportionate to the level of funding given.

**EXAMPLE**

The following are the most common services available from SER and their likely costs<sup>3</sup>:

1. A paper map showing Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs) together with a list of protected or BAP species found within the clients defined boundary or buffered point: £60
2. As (1) above, but including details of the SBIs habitats, grid reference, status as a list: £100
3. As (1) above, but including detailed information about the site and a species list derived from the computerised database (this is dependent on the number of sites involved): from £100
4. As (1) above, but including detailed information about the protected and BAP species (this is dependent on the number of records involved):
5. from £100
6. A site report comprising detailed information about the site and a species list derived from the computerised database: £40
7. Species distribution maps (up to 4 per ½ hour): from £60

After the client has supplied exact details of the information required and the area involved preferably in map form, SER will produce a quotation and the client must agree in writing (e-mail is acceptable) prior to commencement of the work. If unforeseen circumstances increase the cost of the enquiry the client must be informed immediately and agreement reached before continuing. After completion of the enquiry, an invoice is raised by the Wildlife Trust for the value agreed with the client.

### 4.3 CROSS BOUNDARY ENQUIRIES

This policy is designed to describe the process of answering enquiries from commercial organisations affecting the work of more than one of the West Midlands Regional Local Environmental Records Centres:

- EcoRecord (Birmingham and Black Country)
- Herefordshire Biological Records Centre
- Natural Shropshire
- Staffordshire Ecological Record
- Warwickshire Biological Records Centre (including Solihull and Coventry)
- Worcestershire Biological Records Centre

The policy is only intended to cover enquiries where the Local Environmental Records Centres (LERCs) would expect to charge for the service, so enquiries from the general public and education are not included.

It is the LERCs' intention that all commercial enquiries within the region should appear as much as possible to originate from a 'one-stop-shop'. To this end, adjacent LERCs will liaise to accomplish this in cases where the client's search area extends across two or more LERCs' area of coverage.

For any cross-boundary the lead LERC will be the one in whose area the actual search site falls. In most cases this LERC will also be responsible for the majority of the search area, but that is not always the case, owing to the shape of the county boundaries.

<sup>3</sup> The cost of any individual enquiry is dependent on the exact nature of the area involved, so these figures are only a guide.

When raising a quotation for the data search, the lead LERC will offer the cross-boundary service for £45<sup>4</sup> plus VAT. If accepted, the lead LERC will approach the adjacent LERC(s) for their data searches and when complete, will supply the client with the data from each county<sup>5</sup>.

It will be the responsibility of the lead LERC to maintain a record of all cross-boundary. The monies collected from the client for the cross-boundary service should be distributed to the adjacent LERCs on an annual basis after the end of the financial year. Obviously this is often a two-way exchange and therefore only the excess needs to be transferred in one direction, to reduce paperwork.

#### 4.4 ACCESS TO DATA FOR PARTNERS

As a not-for-profit project managed by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust on behalf of the partners, SER operates in accordance with a Development Plan agreed and regularly monitored by a Steering Group composed of representatives from the partner organisations. Funding to operate the project is supplied by the partners which gain benefits from funding the project.

SER offers a suite of map layers for GIS (Geographical Information System) use in either MapInfo or ArcView formats. These can be downloaded by the partner from a secure section of the SER web-site. These layers ensure the partner has access to the best available information – these layers are usually updated 3-4 times per year, or following a Wildlife Site Grading Committee meeting.

SER manages the ecological and geological data it holds to nationally recognised standards and is able to supply information at least to the minimum standards recognised by the Association of Local Ecological Records Centres (ALERC).

The following information is available for download in GIS format:

- All non-statutory Local Wildlife Sites (locally known as Sites of Biological Importance) within the partner's area of operation.
- All other 'graded' ecological sites (Biodiversity Alert Sites) within the partner's area of operation.
- All non-statutory Local Geological Sites (previously known as Regionally Important Geological/geomorphological Sites) within the partner's area of operation.
- Nature Reserves administered by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust within the partner's area of operation.
- Phase 1 habitat cover where available within the partner's area of operation.
- All UK and European protected species records precise to at least 1km resolution within the partner's area of operation.
- All UK Priority species records precise to at least 1km resolution within the partner's area of operation.
- All rare species records according to published Red-data lists precise to at least 1km resolution within the partner's area of operation.

Additional layers are currently being produced and will be made available when complete.

There are two on-line databases supplying the site reports and citations for ALL currently recorded sites throughout Staffordshire – one database covers the ecological sites, whilst the second covers the geological sites – both are accessible from the SER Partner's Area (see below).

<sup>4</sup> This price can be increased for searches covering a larger than normal radius. The normal maximum for the £45 charge is 2km from the client's site. This would need to be discussed between the LERCs.

<sup>5</sup> The data will not normally be combined into a single report unless there is so little information from the adjacent LERC that a separate report would be excessive.

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SER operates a 'Partners' Area' on its website at <http://partners.staffs-ecology.org.uk>. This contains a variety of useful information including:

- The most up-to-date version of the SBI Guidelines
- A table of statistics for use in LA annual monitoring
- Indexes to the popular habitat systems (JNCC Phase 1; NVC & BAP Priority)
- Links to standard documentation on protected sites and species
- An analysis of the data-holdings of SER
- The policies and procedures of SER

In the public web-site, there are online distribution atlases (<http://atlas.staffs-ecology.org.uk>) to the bulk of popular taxonomic groups and although these are freely available, their production would not be possible without the partnership funding.

All partner organisations are allowed a reasonable<sup>6</sup> amount of free enquiries direct to the SER Office – this feature also includes consultancies working directly on behalf of a partner, providing this is clearly authorised prior to undertaking the enquiry.

## 4.5 OTHER DATA ACCESS

SER can run bespoke training events to encourage partner organisations to use SER data to its fullest capacity and can help with digitising existing data owned by the partner, to enable its inclusion in the master SER databases.

SER also supplies a standard spreadsheet (available from the public web-site) to enable the efficient collation of biological records, again for ultimate inclusion in the SER master databases.

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<sup>6</sup> Although not currently defined, if one partner were to make excessive free use of the SER services, this may need to be reviewed, at present this has not been an issue.