

HBIC Recorders Forum 2008 – by Andy Foy (HBIC Senior Ecologist)

The sixth annual HBIC Recorders' Forum was held on Saturday 8th March at the Testwood Lakes Study Centre, near Southampton. The popularity of the event continues to grow, with a wide range of organisations present and nearly 60 delegates in attendance.

The morning was given over to topics relating to the New Forest. Ian Barker (New Forest National Park Authority) started proceedings by introducing the background behind developing a New Forest Biodiversity Action Plan (NFBAP). He summarised the need for the plan, including issues such as development pressure, and the opportunities the plan will provide to raise awareness, engage with a wider audience and expand research, biological recording and monitoring within the Forest. Ian welcomes any input into the NFBAP and ideas for how the recording community can get involved in the current open process of consultation.

Continuing with the New Forest theme, David Rumble (HIWWI) then presented the Trust's new project, surveying possibly the rarest fungus in Europe, Nail Fungus *Poronia punctata*, which is now largely confined to the New Forest. David outlined the survey methodology, cunningly based on walking 7 pub-to-pub transects, looking for the easily recognisable fungus on pony dung piles. The project will be undertaken by volunteers starting this winter. Due to its unpredictable nature the fungus needs long-term effort to get a picture of its distribution.

David Hurst (Hampshire Conservation Volunteers) then presented a new rapid deadwood habitat assessment methodology. The methodology, which arose out of the need to undertake extensive dead wood surveys and the lack of any existing documented national approach, builds an indexed score based on a number of factors such as the diversity of available deadwood habitat, the volume of deadwood habitat and the likelihood of sustaining deadwood in the long-term. Trials have already been completed in the New Forest and, although further trials are required in different woodland types and geographic areas to calibrate the scores, David hopes that in time it can be developed into a national standard.

In the final presentation before lunch Stephen Miles (British Entomological and Natural History Society) used case studies of three species of beetles and hoverflies to demonstrate the complexity of managing heathlands for invertebrates. Stephen showed that changes in commoner's practices and some site management measures, such as controlling erosion from visitors on footpaths, has reduced the amount of suitable habitat available to these species. This initiated a brief discussion on the difficulties of managing habitats for all species, especially those with very exacting habitat requirements.

Lunch break provided an opportunity to look at the various displays upstairs and to catch up with other recorders, sharing experiences and ideas. After lunch Kate Dent (Butterfly Conservation) introduced

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everyone to the Tytherley Woods project, one of three new sites in southeast England selected to demonstrate 'best practice' for woodland management. The project will focus on improving ground flora through the appropriate reintroduction of coppicing, woodland ride management and developing glades and clearings. Although the project is being lead by Butterfly Conservation, and is centred on Bentley Woods, already a hotspot for Lepidoptera, it is hoped that other species will benefit from a more open woodland structure throughout the whole project area and beyond.

Glynne Evans (Hampshire Ornithological Society) introduced the latest BTO Bird Atlas project. Running from 2007 until 2011, and recording birds at the tetrad level (2km squares), it is hoped the project will provide real evidence of recent changes in the bird populations across Hampshire and throughout Britain. The data will also be used to help revise the status of Britain's birds and provide an indication of the affects of climate change.

To round off the species presentations Paul Hope & Colleen Mainstone (Hampshire Bat Group) gave updates on two bat monitoring projects currently underway. Paul presented initial findings from research at the Greywell tunnel on the Basingstoke canal where several species of bats, predominantly Natterers, have been recorded. The tunnel, abandoned in the 1930 when it became blocked, provides a stable temperature environment and has become an internationally important site for bats. Colleen then outlined the recording underway in the New Forest of two of the rarer species of tree roosting bats in the UK, Bechsteins and Barbastelles. Surveyors have been using ringing, radio tagging and roost emergence counts to learn more about the habits and requirements of these two species, both of which roost mostly in trees and require a closed canopy and dense understorey.

Finally, Nicky Court (HBIC) concluded proceedings with an update on how data from recording groups and individuals is being used by HBIC and its partners. Nicky highlighted the importance of species data for providing evidence for valuable species and habitats, especially in the face of increasing development pressure in south-east England.

Many thanks to all of the speakers for their presentations, to Andy Barker for chairing the afternoon session, to Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust for the venue, and to the audience for making it yet another excellent forum.

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