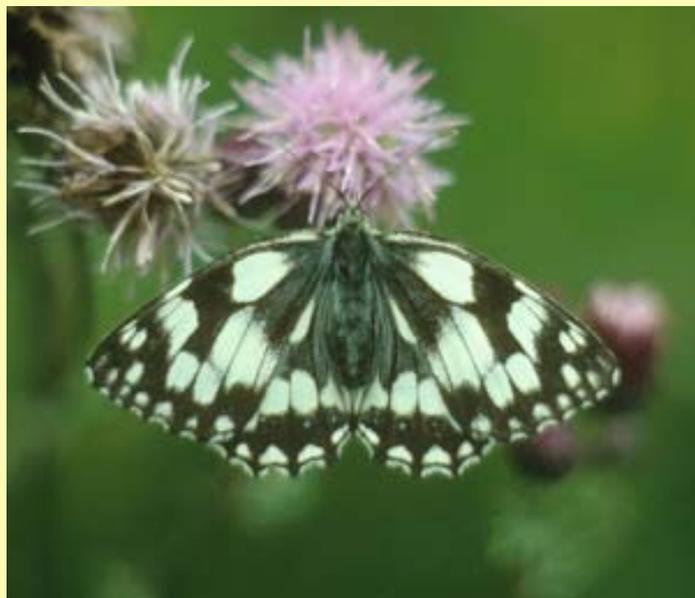

Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre

Who we are and what we do

Nowadays, many of us are aware of news items regarding the environment. Reports such as those concerning the ten million fewer House Sparrows in the UK compared with twenty-five years ago, or how England has lost 190,000 km of hedgerows in the last 50 years are just two examples of issues regularly reported.

But how do researchers and organisations arrive at these figures? Some may think that they've been plucked out of the air, but nothing could be further from the truth. The figures that form the basis for this type of analysis are often collected by individuals who are interested in wildlife and keep a record of what they see, either through their own interest or as part of an organised voluntary project.



Having all of these people collecting this amount of information is very valuable, but it all becomes wasted if there is no central place where all the volunteers' records can be gathered together, validated and verified. This is one of the roles of a local records centre such as BRERC – to gather wildlife and geology data, support voluntary recorders, manage all the data in an appropriate fashion and make sure all the data is made available



And that last point is very relevant, because although a record of a House Sparrow in someone's garden may be used to help chart their decline over the last 25 years, it may also get considered as part of a data search for planning purposes, and be used in a university undergraduate's dissertation. Once the data is held at a records centre, it gets used in many ways, all of which have a positive impact on the environment. Currently we have over 1200 recorders on our mailing list, all of whom submit data to us. This list is growing all the time, and only includes our regular recorders – we receive many more records on a one-off basis.



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Although record centres like BRERC operate on a county-wide scale (BRERC covers the former county of Avon), initiatives such as the government funded National Biodiversity Network (NBN) are aiming to gather up all the records they can and make them available via a website (www.searchnbn.net) so that the data from every region can feed into a nationally recognised and accessible dataset. BRERC was recently the first long-term establish records centre to submit virtually all its records to the NBN. Records centres provide the vital bridge that connect the records submitted by voluntary recorders to local, regional and national usage.

BRERC is one of the oldest record centres in the UK, having started life in 1974 as part of Bristol City Museum & Art Gallery. Now based on the top floor of Bristol Central Library, BRERC has over a million species records on a computerised database, with an estimated three million in paper format waiting to be entered. We have just three permanent members of staff, but we are assisted by more than 20 office based volunteers who enter data onto our databases and GIS mapping systems. Because of our wide user base, BRERC has always been careful to maintain a neutral position with regards to wildlife and environmental issues; it is not a campaigning organisation.



BRERC is a not for profit organisation that receives funding and support from the Avon Wildlife Trust, Bath & North-East Somerset Council, Bristol City Council, South Gloucestershire Council, North Somerset Council, English Nature and the Environment Agency.