Living Levels

WILD WATCH

Guide to Recording Wildlife

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LOTTERY FUNDED

www.livinglevels.org.uk

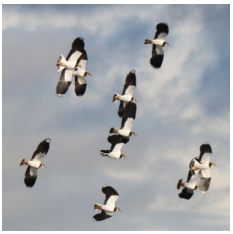
Living Levels: **Wild Watch**

Surveying wildlife is essential to help improve our understanding of the state of nature. Information gathered during surveys will reveal how wildlife numbers and distribution are changing in response to climate change and habitat loss. As in many parts of the UK, wildlife on the Gwent Levels is under-recorded, primarily due to lack of resources. Our Wild Watch project will help to increase the number of "eyes on the ground" and give a clearer picture of a rapidly changing situation.

We have selected 12 target species to concentrate on, one for each month of the year. Over the course of the year volunteer surveyors are asked to look out for and record a range of wildlife, such as barn owl, water vole, mistletoe and shrill carder bee. Volunteers can record one, a few, or all of the target species; and can record the species many times and throughout the year.

For more information, visit www.livinglevels.org.uk/wild-watch


Barn Owl


Lapwing

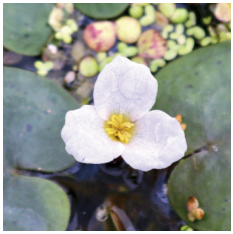

Common Frog


Water Vole


Hairy Dragonfly


Grass Snake


Shrill Carder Bee


Frogbit


Red Admiral


Alder Tongue


Little Egret


Mistletoe

Why are your records important?

Recording wildlife is fun, open to anyone, and can produce very valuable information about UK biodiversity, including what lives where and how populations are changing over time.

Many of us observe wildlife in our daily lives and perhaps make a mental note when we see something of particular interest. Some of us may write these down and keep our own record of the wildlife we've seen. Biological recording does this in a more structured way, by making a permanent record of your observations and sharing them with others. This helps to build a picture of our wildlife locally and nationally, and provide a means of measuring change.

One of the best ways to share biological records is to submit them to a local or national recording scheme, or a Local Environmental Records Centre (LERC).

What should you record?

At its most basic, a biological record needs to include the 'four Ws':

- **WHO** (the name and contact details of the person who saw it)
- **WHAT** (what was seen – use the scientific name if possible)
- **WHERE** (where it was seen – be as accurate as possible, a grid reference is ideal)
- **WHEN** (the date it was seen)

Extra information such as the numbers you saw, life stage, sampling method and habitat adds value to a biological record.

Anyone can record wildlife, but if you're new to the subject the National Biodiversity Network Trust's Darwin Guide to Recording Wildlife is an excellent introduction, including sections with tips on how to record each of the main groups of plants and animals.Follow the link below to download a copy:

www.nbn.org.uk/tools-and-resources/publications/guidance-documents/

Equipment

Life is undoubtedly simpler when you have the right equipment for the job.

There are some basic items that may be useful in the field:

- Pen and/or pencil
- Notebook/recording sheet/or suitable phone app
- Mobile phone (for safety and if using a recording app)
- Hand lens
- Binoculars
- Camera (if possible)*
- First-aid kit
- ID guides

* Cameras can help to reduce or eliminate the need to take specimens, but you should familiarise yourself with the features you need to capture for ID purposes

How should you record?

Recording in the field is either done using a notebook (at least recording the 'four Ws'), a standard paper recording form, or electronically using a website or a mobile phone app.

With paper-based systems, records need to be posted to SEWBReC (South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre) or uploaded via SEWBReC's online recording database (SEWBReCORD) at www.sewbrecord.org.uk. SEWBReC can also receive records via email or phone.

For mobile phones, there are a number of freely available recording apps, including general ones, such as iRecord, and specialised ones for recording particular groups, such as butterflies. LERC Wales (Local Environmental Records Centres Wales) have developed their own recording app, which can be downloaded from the Apple Store or Google Play. Follow the link below for further information about the LERC Wales App :

www.lercwales.org.uk/app.php

- Online recording, either through a website or mobile phone app, is a great way to gather survey data and has a number of advantages over traditional paper-based recording:
- Participants enter their own data which goes straight into a database, therefore less time is spent by scheme organisers entering data from paper recording cards or notebooks.
- Printing and postage costs are saved as fewer paper recording cards need to be produced and distributed.
- Location information can be accurately gathered using Google Maps based systems, or by standardising data entry fields for grid references etc.
- Photos can be included to help with record verification.

Using SEWBReCORD

- Go to www.sewbrecord.org.uk and click on “create new account”. Please complete the form with your details, including a valid email address so you can be contacted if there are questions about your sightings.
- Once logged in, you will be taken to the home page, which displays recent sightings. From the top menu bar, select “Record” and then chose from the three options, according to how many records you would like to submit.
- For a single record, choose “Enter a Casual Record”.
- Complete the record form, filling in as many of the fields as possible. Please note that the fields marked with an asterisk are compulsory. The form also contains a map which can be used to record the location of your sighting.

Further guidelines for using SEWBReCORD can be found on the SEWBReC website at:

www.sewbrec.org.uk/

Staying safe

Whether you are venturing out alone or as part of a group, your personal safety should be paramount.

If you head out on your own, ensure that you notify someone of your intentions, where you are going and when you will be back, and always carry a mobile phone. Be aware that signal coverage can vary greatly and your phone may not work. Plan ahead and if your orienteering skills are a little rusty, stick to public places or established routes.

Consider any possible hazards you might come across and what you can do to minimise any risk of injury or accident. This might mean taking certain equipment to assist you or taking into account weather conditions on the day. If the risk is higher, consider not going alone or waiting until another day. Always take care to avoid problems and, whenever an incident occurs, seek qualified assistance as soon as possible.

Potential hazards to be aware of might include:

- Weather – extreme cold or heat, exposure to the sun, ice.
- Habitat – steep slopes, uneven ground, mud, tides, deep water, thorny bushes.
- Animals – livestock, dogs, insect stings and bites.

Anyone working outside should be protected by a tetanus injection. If in doubt, check with your doctor that yours is up to date. If you have allergies, remember to take your medication with you, and cover any cuts with a waterproof plaster especially if you are going near waterbodies. Remember to always wash your hands before eating, particularly after touching any plants, animals, fungi or water.

Top tips for taking identification photos

- Identification photography is different from traditional wildlife or landscape photography: if your photo is beautifully composed and aesthetically pleasing that's a bonus, but for identification what's needed is to see the features needed to distinguish the species. It does help to have things in focus though!
- Take several photos, from different angles – you never know which one may contain the vital distinguishing feature. But try and include some that are from directly above, or exactly side-on, which will be easier to compare with images in books and keys.
- Try to include something in the photo that will give it a scale (e.g. a coin or ruler in the background), or alternatively make sure you record an accurate (i.e. measured) assessment of size at the time of taking the photo.
- You'll probably need photos that are as close as possible to the species in question, but try to take a few of the surrounding habitat as well.
- Different species groups may need different approaches. For example, when photographing fungi (which are notoriously hard to identify from photos) you should try to get photos from above and below the mushroom cap, as well as of the stem. It may also be useful to photograph what the fungi is growing on (e.g. dead wood, grassland, live tree etc). For moths the best angle is usually from above, while for bees and flies you may need shots from several angles to see all the features needed. For snail shells you often need to see both sides of the shell. For plants you may need to see leaves from the base and from higher up the stem, along with flowers and sometimes fruits.
- Some species can only be identified from photos if the photo shows exactly the right characters; some species cannot be identified from photos at all. It's best to accept these limitations, and only identify things to genus or group. You can then choose to concentrate only on those species that can be identified photographically, or you can proceed to collect specimens or other evidence in those cases where photos alone are not sufficient. When taking specimens, you should only take what you require to identify the species. Please be aware that many recording groups and societies have developed codes of conduct and best practice guidelines for collecting specimens. These guidelines can be found online if required.

Protected species and codes of conduct

Anyone taking part in biological recording should do their best to protect the wildlife they are interested in, and needs to be aware of the legislation protecting wildlife sites and species. A range of laws and policy cover this area, and it can be quite tricky to be sure of what is and isn't allowed.

Here are a few points that can arise in connection with recording activity, but for full details please see the link below.

Birds: it is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act to:

- Intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird
- Take, damage or destroy a nest whilst it is in use or being built
- Take or destroy an egg of any wild bird.

For the rarer species it is an offence to intentionally disturb these birds whilst nesting or to disturb their dependent young.

Plants: Under the Wildlife & Countryside Act it is an offence for any person to intentionally uproot any wild plant unless they are authorised. Authorised people include landowners, land occupiers, persons authorised by either of these or persons authorised in writing by the Local Authority. It is not illegal to pick most wild flowers or fruits (such as blackberries) but it is good practice to leave enough seed and leave the flowers for others to enjoy. Some rare species receive additional protection.

The above is just a summary of some areas of the law, see the link below for more information, or contact your local records centre or wildlife trust for advice specific to your area.

For more information about legislation and codes of conduct download a copy of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee website:

jncc.defra.gov.uk/

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SEWBReC
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