



***Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes***  
**Environmental Records Centre**

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# **Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre**

## **Annual Report 2010-11**



Hawridge & Cholesbury Common © Alison Beck



## Background

Buckinghamshire County Museum has hosted an environmental records centre since the 1970s, now known as the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre (BMERC). This grew from the Museum's long involvement with the curation of natural history specimens and related documentation. The physical collections continue to be maintained and developed, and are widely used as a research, educational and archival resource. BMERC builds on this by providing a service to collate, manage and disseminate data about wildlife, habitats and geology. Most of these data are now held electronically, making them easily accessible for a wide range of users.

The Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre (BMERC) is a partnership between Buckinghamshire County Council, Milton Keynes Council and Natural England. BMERC also has Service Level Agreements with the planning authorities in Wycombe, South Bucks and Aylesbury Vale District Councils, and with the Environment Agency and British Waterways.

## Aims of BMERC

BMERC aims to provide well-maintained, comprehensive, secure data on the biodiversity and geodiversity of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. It will:

- Collate data, from as many sources as possible, on wildlife and geology in Bucks and Milton Keynes
- Manage these data effectively and efficiently
- Ensure the data are available to all who need them, including mobilising data onto the NBN Gateway
- Disseminate the data widely to enthuse and inspire people to care for their environment
- Ensure that data are available to decision-makers who need to assess the impact of decisions on the environment
- Continue to support volunteer recorders in the county, helping them to build capacity and reach new audiences

## Partner statutory requirements

Up-to-date environmental information is provided to Local Authorities with Service Level Agreements (SLA), which allows these partners to demonstrate their meeting of the first key principle of Planning Policy Statement 9 on Biodiversity and Geological Conservation through the use of this information. Access to this information provided by BMERC helps partners to make decisions about avoidance, mitigation, compensation or enhancement measures for biodiversity or geological resources when making decisions on planning applications, strategic documents (such as Local Development Frameworks) and site management plans.

Data provided by BMERC will also help to demonstrate the local authority's meeting of their legal duty under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, which states:

*"Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity."*

(Section 40(1))

Whereby conserving biodiversity includes:

*"...in relation to a living organism or type of habitat, restoring or enhancing a population or habitat."*

(Section 40(3))

As part of the Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Biodiversity Partnership, BMERC manage the Local Wildlife Sites GIS layers and provide these to SLA partners for use in their enquiries and decision making as well as inclusion within their strategic planning documents. BMERC provide vital support to the Local Sites partnership in assisting them in managing their data which is used at a county level in reporting on the National Indicator 197: Improved Local Biodiversity – proportion of Local Sites where positive conservation management has been or is being implemented.

In light of the proposed High Speed Rail link route going through the heart of Buckinghamshire and in particular the Chilterns AONB, having access to up-to-date environmental information on sites, species and habitats is even more important.

## Partner comments

*'The biodiversity information collected and managed by LRCs underpin Natural England's and our partners' decision making in protecting and enhancing our important habitats and species, in terms of improving people's access and understanding of the natural environment and in adapting to future challenges such as climate change.'* (Natural England)

*'The Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre (BMERC) is essential to the work of the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) and it would be catastrophic if it ceased to exist.'* (BBOWT)

## Staff and volunteers

Over the last year there have been a number of staff (including partner staff) developments.

Fabrizia Ratto joined BMERC as the new Environmental Records Officer (ERO) at the beginning of July 2010. She had previously been working at the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (HBIC) since January 2009 undertaking a similar role to her current post. She also has an excellent background in conservation and surveying skills, with particular interest in Lepidoptera. Fabrizia is a welcome addition to the team.

Steve Crowther (Landscape & Countryside Strategy Manager) retired from his post at Milton Keynes Council and as representative for MKC with BMERC. Steve was wished all the very best for his retirement and future and thanks were given to him for all his valuable input into the steering of BMERC and assistance provided when BMERC staff work in the MK offices. His role will be taken over by John Price.

BMERC continues to work closely with the Museum's Natural History Keeper (Mike Palmer) on many biodiversity and geodiversity related projects, especially events and activities aimed at engaging the wider public with wildlife and recording.

BMERC continues to be very grateful to the many volunteers who provide their wildlife information, either directly or via the various species groups in the county and also helping with events such as the Bucks Wonderful Wildlife Day at College Lake that happened last summer. Several of the county wildlife recorders have helped BMERC with record validation and verification; Roy Maycock (BSBI county plant recorder), for example, continues to generously provide his expertise. The continuing work of a number of office-based volunteers during the year should be noted, particularly Mic and Jan Wells who have been processing county mammal records (see below).

## Finances

Although this last year saw a slight reduction in the base budget from Buckinghamshire County Council, nearly 75% of BMERC's funding continued to come from 3 key partners; Buckinghamshire County Council (37%) (via the County Museum, part of the council's Culture and Learning Service), Milton Keynes Council (18%) and Natural England (19%). Service Level Agreements remain in place with three District Councils in Buckinghamshire (Aylesbury Vale, South Bucks and Wycombe), the Environment Agency and British Waterways (see table below). Natural England (NE) continued to support BMERC through a Memorandum of Agreement that is set to come to an end on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011. The £15k per annum support from NE has largely facilitated the restructuring of BMERC and the continued support of core work, in particular the mobilisation of datasets onto the NBN Gateway (see later in report).

In 2010-11 the total BMERC budget was around £134,000 (including carry over) with expenditure around £92,000 (not including office costs, which are provided in kind by the County Museum). The bulk of expenditure was taken up by staffing costs with small amounts going to pay for subscriptions (ALERC), software and IT equipment, plus small grants to volunteer recording groups.

The following table gives a breakdown of the budget over the past two years and highlights the current income and expenditure of BMERC (Actual to date 2010-11 column). The Anticipated 2011-12 has changed since previous update reports in light of changes to BMERC position, including staffing.

When looking at the budget into 2012-13, the balance at the end of March 2013 is about £52,000 available for carry over. Over future years more uncertainty appears as all income is estimated based on past figures.

BMERC Annual Report 2010 - 2011

**Income**

Funder	Type of funding	Amount in 2009-10	Amount in 2010-11	Anticipated amount 2011-12	Anticipated amount 2012-13	Anticipated amount 2013-14	Anticipated amount 2014-15
Buckinghamshire County Council	Core funding - Base budget	£29,500	£28,700	£24,395	£20,004	£16,203	£16,203
Milton Keynes Council	Core funding	£13,707	£13,847	£13,016	£12,235	£11,501	£11,501
Wycombe District Council	SLA (data plus enquiries)	£3,251	£3,284	£3,383	£3,484	£3,589	£3,696
South Bucks District Council	SLA (data only)	£502	£507	£522	£538	£554	£571
Aylesbury Vale District Council	SLA (data only)	£502	£507	£522	£538	£554	£571
Chiltern District Council	AMR (data only)	£210	£240	£240	£240	£240	£240
British Waterways	SLA (data only)	£400	£400	£400	£400	£400	£400
Contrib. to Recorders' Seminar	LA contributions		£1,500	£1,500	£1,500	£1,500	£1,500
<b>Sub Total</b>		<b>£18,572</b>	<b>£20,285</b>	<b>£19,583</b>	<b>£18,935</b>	<b>£18,338</b>	<b>£18,479</b>
Natural England	MoA (data only)	£15,000	£15,000	£12,000	£12,000	£12,000	£12,000
Environment Agency	SLA (data plus enquiries)	£5,000	£5,500	£5,500	£6,000	£6,000	£6,000
<b>Grant Income Sub Total</b>		<b>£20,000</b>	<b>£20,500</b>	<b>£17,500</b>	<b>£18,000</b>	<b>£18,000</b>	<b>£18,000</b>
Commercial enquiries / projects	Cost of service provided	£7,830	£11,500	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>£75,902</b>	<b>£80,985</b>	<b>£71,478</b>	<b>£66,939</b>	<b>£62,541</b>	<b>£62,682</b>
Grant Carry Over		£35,000	£55,000	£43,500	£52,500	£52,500	£47,000
<b>Total (incl. carry over)</b>		<b>£110,902</b>	<b>£135,985</b>	<b>£114,978</b>	<b>£119,439</b>	<b>£115,041</b>	<b>£109,682</b>
BCC 1.02% income inflation increase		3% inflation increase		To reflect the new BMERC hourly/daily service charge			
2009-10 includes 2008-09 £30k from NE and £5k from EA carry over grant money. 2010-11 includes 2009-10 carry over grant money as well as the 2010-11 grant money							

**Expenditure**

Type	Amount in 2009-10	Amount in 2010-11	Anticipated amount 2011-12	Anticipated amount 2012-13	Anticipated amount 2013-14	Anticipated amount 2014-15
Staff salaries	£35,000	£85,930	£53,500	£60,380	£61,200	£62,000
Recruitment costs	£3,280	£1,250	£1,250	£300	£300	£300
Training - Recorders' Seminar	£0	£1,440	£2,360	£2,360	£2,360	£2,360
Staff expenses	£300	£910	£700	£700	£700	£700
Software, books, equipment	£270	£45	£100	£100	£100	£100
Other costs (printing, phones, IT)	£130	£1,855	£1,860	£1,860	£1,860	£1,860
Grants to voluntary groups	£570	£410	£900	£900	£900	£900
Subscriptions	£120	£220	£220	£220	£220	£220
Contractor costs	£11,210	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
<b>Total</b>	<b>£50,880</b>	<b>£92,060</b>	<b>£60,890</b>	<b>£66,820</b>	<b>£67,640</b>	<b>£68,440</b>
Represents reduced staffing to 2 posts and incremental salary increase. 2012 onwards represents two R5 posts						
Includes £10,210 TVERC and £1k for HBIC for development of the habitat data capture tool					Incl. £800 per PC internal lease cost	

**Balance**

Amount Mar 2010	Amount Mar 2011	Anticipated amount Mar 2012	Anticipated amount Mar 2013	Anticipated amount Mar 2014	Anticipated amount Mar 2015
£60,022	£43,925	£54,088	£52,619	£47,401	£41,242

This figure does not include any paid contractor costed work that may be required

These figure's are based on grant carry over figures

Figures: assume contin'd funding (though reduced), do not incl. project work that will bring in additional funding or potential increases in

## Achievements in 2010-11

In addition to the routine work of managing data and answering enquiries (see performance indicators, below), tasks completed and/or in progress by BMERC during 2010/11 included the following.

- *Partnerships:*
  - Renewal of all SLAs with partners achieved in Autumn 2010. Chiltern District Council still not included in SLA, though produced biodiversity report for their Annual Monitoring Report in 2010
  - New Data Exchange Agreements established with the following groups and recorders:
    - People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES)
    - Buckinghamshire Bird Club
    - North Bucks Bat Group
    - Roy Maycock (Data and Service Exchange Agreement)
    - Aaron Woods (Data and Services Exchange Agreement)
    - City of London (Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common)

(See page 9 for current active data agreements)

- *Sites:*
  - Data entry for the Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) project completed following the departure of the Wildlife Sites Project Officer
  - LWS selection panel meetings held in March and December, hosted and attended by BMERC with subsequent GIS management of boundaries undertaken (including archiving of Biological Notification Sites (BNS) that did not meet selection criteria)
  - Review and update completed of LWS GIS layer fields and attributes to include elements such as which Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA) a site falls within
  - Review of selection criteria for LGS, based on Local Sites guidance document<sup>1</sup>, undertaken with consultation, establishing clear set of criteria (minor changes made, mostly fitting within nationally agreed criteria headings as set out within guidance)
  - Set up and running of selection panel meeting for the Local Geological Sites (LGS) project, whereby a few new sites designated and a number archived as no longer meeting selection criteria. Similar processing of GIS boundary data carried out following meeting.
  - Continued close working with the Bucks Earth Heritage Group, in particular with regards to the Local Geological Sites work
- *Species:*
  - Nearly 200,000 species records have been added to the BMERC database, a large proportion of these being bird records from the Bucks Bird Club and a large dataset from Butterfly Conservation
  - Data drops of species records were made to all SLA partners to an agreed schedule (6 monthly data drops by end of June and December). Delays were encountered with the latest data drop as a consequence of a delay in the selection panel meeting and then subsequent delay with some sites being queried during the consultation phase. Partners were informed of the delay and data drops carried out as soon as confirmation of approval was received
  - PTES records have successfully been incorporated into the BMERC database
  - Butterfly Conservation data has now been incorporated, after a long period of delay, made possible with the increase in staffing capacity, which freed up the Environmental Records Data Officer to establish the appropriate procedures for entry
  - Bucks Bird Club data has also been entered onto the BMERC database
  - Work has started on the cleaning of the North Bucks Bat Group GIS dataset, to improve management of data by the group and enable efficient exchange of records with BMERC and vice versa.

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<sup>1</sup> Local Sites - guidance on their identification, selection and management (2006):  
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/documents/protected/localsites.pdf>

- *Habitats:*
  - UK BAP Priority habitat data is now included within the data drops to partners
  - Inputting into development of Habitat and Land Use toolkit for management of habitat dataset when BCC receive dataset back from GeoData who have been converting it into standardised MasterMap Habitat Framework (work being carried out at regional level through South East Local Environmental Records Centres and with funding from Natural England)
  - Discussions still to happen in regards to the future management of the Bucks and MK Habitat Dataset (to be discussed further when BMERC move across to Planning, Environment and Development Service, within the Historic and Natural Environment Team)
  
- *Providing information:*
  - By end of March 2011 120 commercial data enquiries had been handled which is down slightly from last year (see pages 7 – 9 below)
  - The new Charging Policy was agreed at the start of the year by the Steering Group and the policy uploaded onto the BMERC website
  - Overall enquiries total (including non-commercial) during last year were 265
  - BMERC's Bryophyte data (3432 records) was uploaded onto the NBN Gateway, covering 241 recorded species
  - Additionally, Buckinghamshire Bird data (119000 records) has also been uploaded, covering 320 recorded species
  - Updating of existing records uploaded onto the NBN Gateway has also taken place, with a regular program of updates being implemented for these
  - Mammal records are set to be the next dataset to upload to the NBN Gateway, however, this is unlikely to include Bucks Badger records as a Data Exchange Agreement has yet to be established
  
- *Working with volunteers and the public:*
  - Mic and Jan Wells (County Mammal Recorders) continue to visit BMERC in Halton to undertake mammal record inputting
  - BMERC continues to directly support the Buckinghamshire Invertebrate Group (BIG) and Buckinghamshire Rare Plants Recording Group (BRPRG) (volunteer recording groups) and Buckinghamshire Earth Heritage Group (BEHG) (the latter undertaken jointly with the Museum Natural History Keeper, Mike Palmer), and liaise with other volunteer recorders in the county
  - Full management, set up and running of the 2011 Bucks and MK Recorders' Seminar conference has been taken on by BMERC. A successful conference was held at the beginning of March 2011 where a high turnout of recorders was seen (95) and very interesting, informative and inspiring presentations given by some very good guest speakers and local groups
  - BMERC had a stall at the Bucks Wonderful Wildlife Day at College Lake. Working with the Bucks Museum Natural History Keeper displays and exhibits were used and BMERC were grateful for the voluntary help that was also provided on the day
  - Additionally, BMERC had a stall at the Green Fair at Wendover CE Junior School (along with many other conservation and recording groups) in September 2010 which was very successful in engaging with the local community and highlighting the role of BMERC
  - Discussions had begun with the Bucks Invertebrate Group (BIG) to help BMERC validate and verify its numerous invertebrate records. It was decided that one of the smaller taxonomic invertebrate groups would be trialled to see how the process worked and move on to the other groups from that. This work will need to be planned into next years work programme to progress forward
  - Two talks were given as part of the Museum Gallery Talks programme, one on the Why and How of Wildlife Surveying by the Environmental Records Centre Manager and the other on the Duke of Burgundy Butterfly in Bucks by the Environmental Records Officer.
  
- *Other projects:*
  - BMERC completed work on the production of biodiversity maps and county specific biodiversity information, which formed part of the Biodiversity and Planning in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes guidance document. The work was being co-ordinated by BBOWT and additionally funded by Buckinghamshire County Council, Milton Keynes Council and Natural England.

This document has now been made available via the Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Biodiversity Partnership website:

[http://www.buckinghamshirepartnership.gov.uk/sites/partnership/bmkbp/biodiversity\\_and\\_planning.page](http://www.buckinghamshirepartnership.gov.uk/sites/partnership/bmkbp/biodiversity_and_planning.page)

- BMERC were commissioned by the Chilterns Conservation Board to carry out a habitat audit (including wider biodiversity interest) across the Chilterns Commons. This was done as a desktop study, drawing on the data held by the four Local Environmental Records Centres that cover the area of the Chilterns AONB. This will form part of the CCB's bid to HLF for funding for a Chilterns Commons Project
  - Reports on the core and local Biodiversity Indicators were again provided for inclusion in the Annual Monitoring Reports of the Local Development Frameworks to some of the Bucks local authorities - Chiltern District Council, Milton Keynes Council and Wycombe District Council. These reports were made available in October 2010.
- *Liaison:*
    - BMERC has attended at regular meetings of the South East Local Records Centres Managers meetings, to share best practice and help develop regional working.
    - Staff also attended the first ALERC conference which provided opportunity to input into development of an Accreditation System for LRCs which is supported and funded by Natural England under the Defra Biological Recording Framework and by ALERC.

## **Future of BMERC**

Following discussions over the past year at senior management level it was proposed that BMERC move from within the Culture and Learning Service (within the Museum) to within Planning, Environment and Development Service, working alongside the Historic and Natural Environment teams.

There are a lot of synergies between these teams, in particular in relation to the services provided by the Historic Environment Record and also with regards to the management of data and service provision with Local Wildlife Sites and Habitat mapping.

As of April 2011 BMERC will move organisationally to the Planning, Environment & Development service within Buckinghamshire County Council. As part of this move, and the longer term sustainability of BMERC, it was decided by the main funding partners of the Steering Group, that the staffing should be reduced and re-assessed next financial year. As a consequence the manager post has been cut, with the new team manager of the Historic and Natural Environment Team taking on management of BMERC and the two other posts transferring across.

Additionally, BMERC offices and staff will physically move to work alongside the Historic and Natural Environment teams when they relocate to County Hall in May 2011.

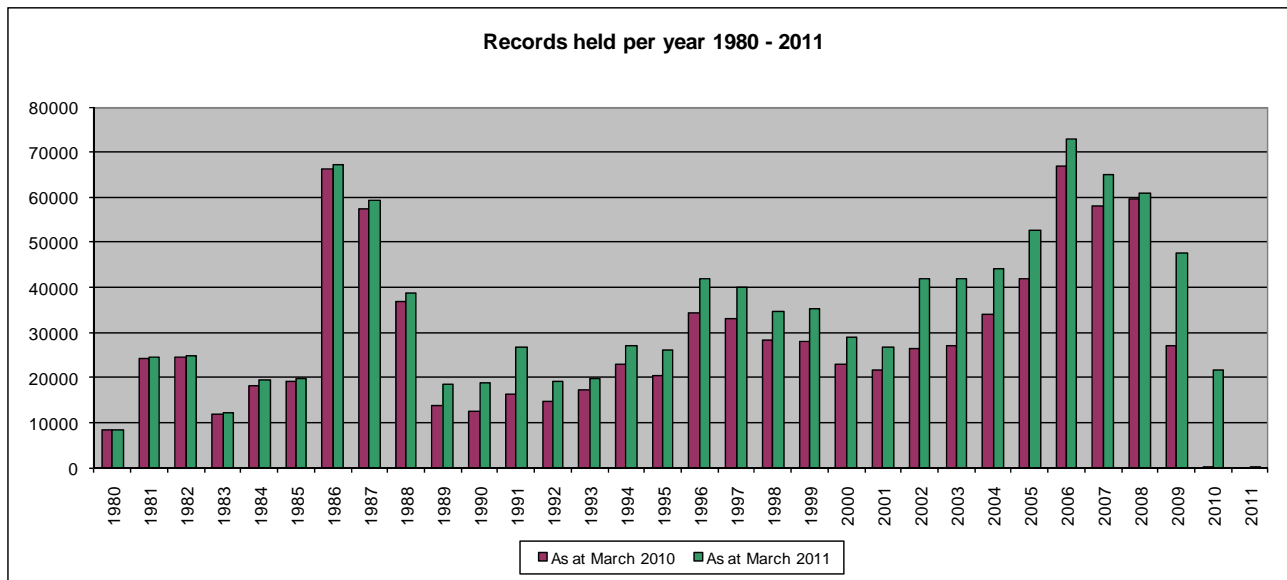
## Performance indicators 2010-11

- Species records available on database end of 2009-10:

1,116,248

- Species records available on database end February 2011:

**1,312,460** (i.e. **196,212** added during year)



## Data Enquiries

- Speed of response:

- 92% of enquiries received an initial response within 3 days
- 6.8% of enquiries received an initial response within 10 days
- 0.4% of enquiries received response after 10 working days but within client's deadline
- 0.8% failed to meet deadline

### Overall

- 99% within deadline

- Enquirer categories 2010-11:

Enquirer	No. of Enquiries	% of Total
Local Gov.	76	29%
Consultant	128	48%
Public	14	5%
NGO	19	7%
Nat'l Gov./Agency	3	1%
Research	0	0%
Utility co.	6	2%
Vol. Group	9	3%
Business	3	1%
Media	0	0%
School/College	6	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Current Data Agreements

<b>Agreement</b>	<b>Client</b>
Access Agreement (Business)	National Trust (NT)
AMR - Biodiversity Indicators Report	Chiltern District Council (CDC)
Collaborative Agreement	Environment Agency (EA) - (Thames Region)
Core Funding	Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC)
Data Exchange Agreement	BSBI VC24 county plant recorder (Roy Maycock)
	Buckinghamshire Badger Group (BBG)
	Buckinghamshire Bird Club
	Bucks Amphibian & Reptile Group (BucksARG)
	Butterfly Conservation (Upper Thames Branch) (BC)
	City of London (Burnham Beeches and Stoke Common)
	People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES)
	North Bucks Bat Group
Data and Service Exchange Agreement	Roy Maycock
	Aaron Woods
Information Use Agreement	Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)
Joint Agreement - Core Funding	Milton Keynes Council (MKC)
Memorandum of Agreement	Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)
	Natural England (NE)
Service Level Agreement	Aylesbury Vale District Council (AVDC)
	British Waterways (BW)
	South Bucks District Council (SBDC)
	Wycombe District Council (WDC)
Spatial Data Licence Agreement	Forestry Commission (FC)
	The Woodland Trust (WT)

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