



Dorset Environmental Records Centre

Annual Report 2021-22

Registered Charity Number 900287

Company Number 2447393

Registered Office:
Dorset History Centre, Bridport Road,
Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1RP



Pyramidal Orchid © Carolyn Steele

Chairman's Report for 2021/22

Reading our Annual Report, it is clear that DERC continues to fulfil its duties as set out in our Memorandum and Articles of Association. Not only are these duties fulfilled, but each year the organisation builds upon the previous year, with continuing success in its data collation via Living Record and Recorder. There is increasing dissemination of data through vehicles such as data requests and the Dorset Biodiversity Information System that is widely used by local authorities and utilities.

Living Record continues to be a most useful tool for recorders with over 1 million records now gathered for Dorset and huge numbers of records for moths and vascular plants being added annually. Congratulations to Adrian Bicker who developed this, and the team that supported its use in Dorset. Nearly 110,000 of these records went onto Recorder in 2022, bringing the total number records on our database to around 3.6 million.

Carolyn has reported that DERC made a profit of £113,320 in the year to 31 March 2022. Despite Covid and uncertain economic times DERC has been able to attract projects and therefore income, all competently managed by Carolyn. During 2021 and early 2022 a more environmentally aware culture has been developing as people struggled with lifestyle choices during the Covid epidemic and increasingly obvious evidence of climate change. We hope that this continues in the form of more environmental projects for DERC staff to be involved with.

I am pleased to say that the core staff and Trustees remains the same during this last year. However, we were sorry that towards the end of 2021 Rhiannon proposed that she retires in April 2022. We could not have had a more efficient and dedicated Finance and Administrative Officer and all Trustees have been wholehearted in their praise and thanks to Rhiannon for her 20-year term in office. There have been opportunities therefore to add to the DERC staff and we welcomed Silvia Friere as Records Centre Assistant and Jo Stephens as Ancient Woodland Inventory Officer. Once again, I can thank the whole team for a great year for DERC.

Kevin Cook

Dorset Environmental Records Centre

Our aims are set out in the Memorandum and Articles of Association (1989). They are:

- to collect and provide quality biological and geological data for the county;
- to ensure that data can be provided quickly and efficiently;
- to provide a service to all professionals involved in conservation and planning within Dorset;
- to provide all amateur naturalists with support for field recording in the county,
- to provide a public service: the principal activities of the charity are to provide environmental services, education and training.

DERC structure, governance and management:

Governing document

The company is a registered charity, Number 900287, limited by guarantee and having no share capital. The company was formed on 29 November 1989 to continue the work of the Dorset Environmental Records Centre (DERC) and all assets were transferred to the company on 1 March 1990. The company was established under a Memorandum of Association, which established the objects and powers of the charitable company and is governed under its Articles of Association. In the event of the company being wound up members are required to contribute an amount not exceeding £1.

DERC Directors and employees

Directors

Lyn Cooch	(Dorset Council)
Kevin Cook	(Chairman, consultant ecologist)
Jennifer Cripps	(Dorset Natural History & Archaeological Society)
Imogen Davenport	(Dorset Wildlife Trust)
John Davis	(Consultant Ecologist)
Annabel King	(Dorset Council)
John Newbould	(Dorset Natural History & Archaeological Society)
Nicholas Squirrell	(on behalf of Natural England)
Phil Sterling	(Butterfly Conservation)
Sarah Welton	(Dorset Wildlife Trust)

Employees

Carolyn Steele	Records Centre Manager
Alison Stewart	Environmental Database Manager
Bryan Edwards	Ecologist
Jon Corkill	GIS Officer
Rhiannon Rogers	Finance and Administration Officer
Silvia Friere	Records Centre Assistant
Jo Stephens	AWI Project Officer

Appointment of Trustees

The directors of the company are also charity trustees for the purposes of charity law and under the company's Articles are known as members of the Trust. The Board of Management manages the affairs of the Trust, with the number of members of the Board being between 6 and 12. The Articles state that there are to be no less than two Board members representing each of Dorset County Council, Dorset Wildlife Trust and Dorset Natural History & Archaeological Society. New trustees are elected by invitation from the Board, who aim to recruit from a diverse background of related organisations and interests. The Trustees meet every quarter to oversee the work of the Records Centre and its continued development.

On 1st April 2019 two new unitary authorities were founded in Dorset. Dorset Council and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Unitary Authority replaced Dorset County Council, two unitary authorities (Bournemouth and Poole) and six district authorities.

Trustee induction and training

Trustees are already familiar with the practical work of the charity and will have been invited to attend management meetings as an observer, prior to becoming a trustee. An induction pack for new trustees has been put together, and includes a copy of the Memorandum and Articles, the Charity Commission guide "The Essential Trustee" and the latest annual report and financial statements.

Organisation

The Board of Trustees administers the charity and meets quarterly. The Secretary, members of Dorset Environmental Records Centre staff and non-Trustee advisers also attend the quarterly Trustee meetings but do not have voting rights. The Record Centre Manager is appointed by the Trustees to manage the day-to-day operations of the charity, including supervision of staff and volunteers.

Related Parties

The Trust works closely with local authorities in Dorset and government organisations (including Natural England and the Environment Agency).

Objectives and activities

The principle activity of the company as set out in the Memorandum and Articles of Association is the advancement of public education in the natural history and geology of Dorset. This is achieved through the following objectives:

- to collect and provide quality biological and geological data for the county;
- to ensure that data can be provided quickly and efficiently;
- to provide a service to all professionals involved in conservation and planning within Dorset;
- to provide all amateur naturalists with support for field recording in the county;
- to provide a public service: the principal activities of the charity are to provide environmental services, education and training.

The Records Centre provides a valuable link between local naturalists and professionals. Each year DERC answers numerous enquiries from members of the public, students, consultants, local authorities and government agencies, and each time depends upon information updated largely by voluntary recorders in our local community. In return the Records Centre provides a website and bi-annual newsletters to update everyone on recording issues and new finds and provides administrative assistance for the Dorset Flora Group (DFG).

We take this opportunity within our annual report to include a note of thanks for everyone who has submitted their records of sightings from the last year.

Risk management

Procedures are in place to ensure compliance with health and safety of staff, volunteers and people attending workshops in the field. The Health and Safety Policy is usually reviewed annually by the Board of Trustees. With the coronavirus pandemic the staff have complied with Dorset Council advice in the office and followed an amended procedure for fieldwork.

Potential external risks to funding have led to consideration of the diversification of funding opportunities. Internal control risks are minimised by the implementation of procedures for co-authorising online payments.

Health and Safety Policy

The Trustees review and update the Health and Safety policy annually in the light of any incidents. It is a requirement that any incidents are reported to the Record Centre Manager; no incidents occurred within the year to 31 March 2022.

Achievements and performance in 2021-22

The Record Resource

Almost 110,000 records were imported to the Recorder database during the year. The majority of records came from the most recent five-year period of Butterfly Conservation's data, along with other sources of butterfly data contributed via Living Record. Amongst other work on the data, general tidying of free text fields and removal of personal references has continued.

The total number of records on the database at the end of March 2022 was 3,661,988.

Requests for Data

During 2021/22 there was an increase in the number of data requests to 1007. The proportion of commercial requests increased to 87% of all enquiries, with 2% for agreement holders and 11% of enquires from private individuals, students or conservation organisations. The data automation is now an essential tool to help staff respond to the increased number of enquiries in a timely way.

DERC continue to provide GIS data through the Dorset Biodiversity Information System which allows agreement holders to access data sets multiple times throughout the year or to use data as a screening tool for potential works.

Dorset Biodiversity Information System

The Dorset Biodiversity Information System has developed as a way to provide data to local authorities and some of our partner organisations through GIS layers. GIS allows the user to look at species and site data over OS base maps or aerial photos. Through our data agreements, data has been provided to BCP Council, Dorset Council, Dorset Wildlife Trust, the Environment Agency and Wessex Water. A new agreement has been set up for the Purbeck Heaths NNR. Site boundaries for Sites of Nature Conservation Interest, Local Geological Sites, Local Nature Reserves, Conservation Verges and Habitat Restoration Sites and species data layers have all been updated.

Dorset Habitat Layer

The Dorset Habitat Layer has data from a variety of surveys, including SNCI surveys and DERC contract surveys. Using IHS (Integrated Habitat System) all habitats from improved grassland to priority heathland are included in a single layer. A second layer, Dorset Priority Habitats, has also been produced. This only includes those habitats protected through current legislation. Since 2012 these layers have been made available to Dorset Wildlife Trust, Dorset Council and BCP Council through the Dorset Biodiversity Information System.

These habitat layers will continue to be updated through on-going work, with updates available annually.

Dorset Marine Biodiversity Database

The Dorset Marine Biodiversity Database is held by DWT and DWT respond to requests for marine data (co-ordinated by DERC as appropriate).

DERC Contracts

During 2021/221 survey work included allocation sites in the local plan for Dorset Council, East Weare for Portland Port and fungi surveys at Bovington for the MoD and several sites for Natural England.

DERC began collating information for a series of Biodiversity Character Area reports to complement the AONB Landscape Character Areas, this work will continue next year.

DERC has continued to work closely with the Natural Environment Team at Dorset Council to extract data from Biodiversity Plans. Data from ecological reports is being extracted from surveys and will be verified in the usual way before the data is added to the database. It will then be available to help inform future development in Dorset. Similarly, DERC are extracting data from ecological reports provided by BCP Council which will help inform further development within the conurbation.

Urban Heaths Partnership Project

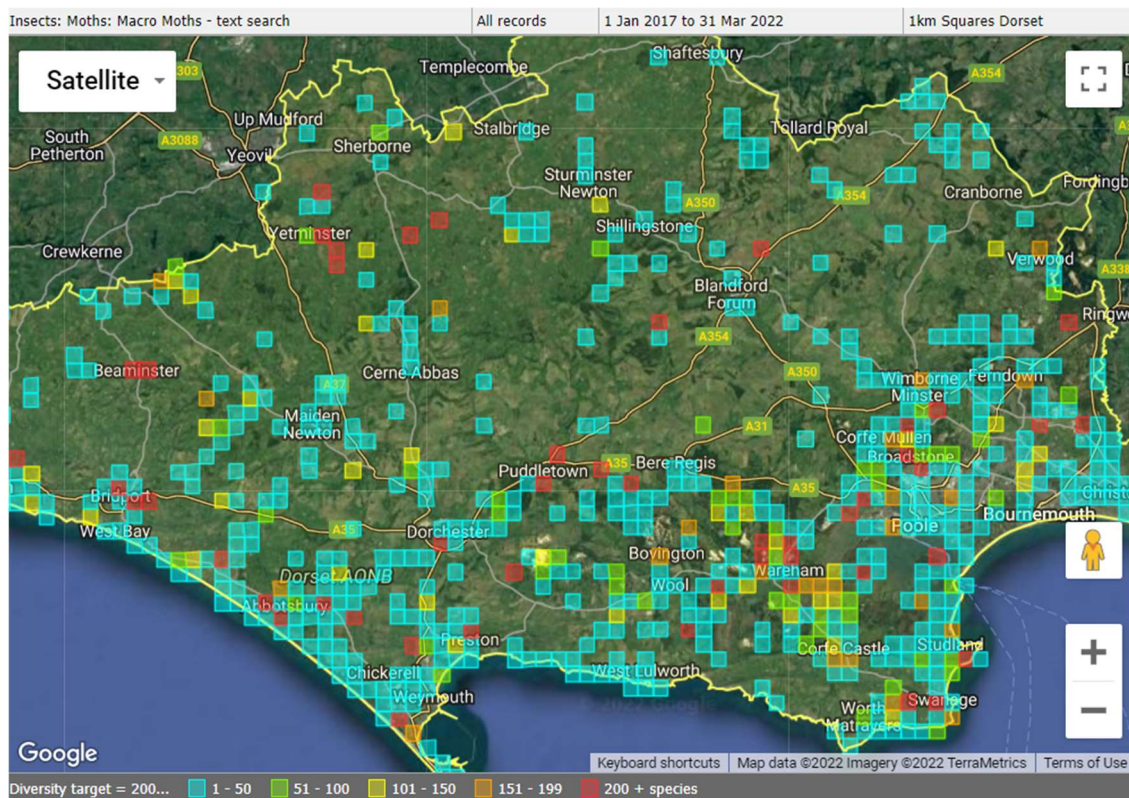
The Urban Heaths Partnership project is derived from the EU LIFE project which ran from 2002 – 2005 and was established to help combat urban pressures on the internationally important heathlands in Southeast Dorset. The current partnership includes local authorities, emergency services, wildlife organisations and government bodies. DERC's role in the project is to disseminate fire records from the Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service (DWFRS) to the partner organisations and to provide figures, reports and other requests for data from the partners.

There are many different types of incident which are detrimental to the heathland with the most common being fire, vandalism, fly-tipping, mountain biking, and motor cycling. The data collected on these incidents has been used to reveal trends and patterns in activity on the heaths. This is useful, for instance, in allowing wardening to be targeted to the most affected places (e.g. Canford Heath which has had, at 810, more incidents recorded than at any other site) and at a time when incidents occur most often..

Living Record – on-line recording for Dorset

Living Record continues to be the main source of online recording used by DERC. During the year 123,137 records were added to Living Record, taking the total number of Dorset records collected via this system to over 1 million (1,099,203). Moth records (629,285) and Vascular Plant records (250,545) continue to top the charts.

Using Living Record for much of the DFG recording for the BSBI Atlas has helped populate the map and now there are good species lists for many 1 km squares across the county (see map below).



Recording Groups

DERC has always worked with species recording groups in Dorset, supporting them through the provision of data and maps, data processing and amendments to Living Record. DERC provides administrative support for the DIGS group, which promotes the geology of Dorset through its website and publications and maintains a number of inland local geological sites. DERC maintains the contact database for the Dorset Flora Group, sending out information on events and courses.

During the year Covid continued to restrict meetings for some groups and numbers were down for many recording days but most people found a way to continue collecting and providing records, even if only from their own garden or local patch.

Public Benefit

In 2021/22 DERC Trustees paid due regard to the Charity Commission guidance on public benefit, overseeing the work undertaken by DERC during the year. DERC's principal aim as a charity is the advancement of public education in the natural history and geology of Dorset. The activities undertaken in the year (as listed above) demonstrate that DERC has been actively involved with local recording groups through promotion of their activities to the wider public and administrative support to co-ordinate the membership. In addition, DERC officers have provided maps for site visits or to monitor recording effort and results, provided space on the DERC website to promote the work of recording groups (or links to recording group websites) and promoted workshops and walks available to group members and members of the public.

ALERC

DERC is a member of the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC). ALERC provides a central voice on behalf of UK LERCs developing and promoting accreditation and advocating good standards of practice.

Financial Review:

DERC made a profit of £113,320 in the year to 31 March 2022. Copies of the Report of the Directors and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2022 are available from the DERC office.

The Report of the Accountant to the Trustees has been prepared by Scott Vevers Chartered Accountants, 65 East Street, Bridport, Dorset DT6 3LB. DERC's bankers are Lloyds, Dorchester Branch, 1 High West Street, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1UG.

DERC wishes to acknowledge contributions received from Dorset Council and BCP Council, Environment Agency, Wessex Water and Dorset Wildlife Trust.

Reserves Policy

Dorset Environmental Records Centre (DERC) maintains a stable pattern of expenditure from month to month, the majority of its costs being staff salaries, tax and national insurance. However, a significant amount of DERC's income is from grants funded by other organisations, who themselves are subject to a fluctuating financial climate. The reserves policy requires that DERC should hold instant access funds at a level that will cover three months' expenditure and any surplus has been transferred to COIF investments. This will maximise the potential to earn investment income whilst ensuring retention of the staff that have the skills and local knowledge that are key to the on-going work of DERC. DERC's Reserves Policy is considered at each quarterly Trustees meeting in relation to actual income and expenditure and the policy is renewed annually. Reserves are held by CCLA Investment Management Ltd, 80 Cheapside, London EC2V 6DZ.

DERC's activities in the year to 31st March 2022 continued to provide a good and reliable information and survey service with no significant changes or developments during the year. At 31st March 2021, reserves held by the company were £367,593, being in accordance with the above policy. All of the company's reserves are considered by the trustees to be unrestricted. However, some years ago the trustees earmarked funds of £8,000 to cover the future costs involved in producing DERC publications on the species and habitats of the county. This sum is treated within these financial statements as a designated fund within the unrestricted reserves.

Investment Policy

DERC's Reserves Policy states that it is desirable to hold reserves at a level that will cover 3 months expenditure. Therefore, it is DERC's policy to invest the moneys of the Trust not immediately required for its purposes in funds that:

- are in accordance with the Trustee Investment Act 2000,
- provide reasonable access,
- provide income at a competitive rate for current needs, and
- preserve or increase the value of investments for the future.

To minimise risk, DERC funds are invested through a specialist charity investment fund approved by the Charity Commission, with due regard to ethical investments whilst maximising the return on capital.