



Recording Wiltshire's Wildlife



Notes for Volunteers

Firstly a big 'thank you' for expressing an interest in helping to record Wiltshire's biodiversity, your sightings will go towards providing a clearer understanding of the health of our wildlife.

About Us

The Wiltshire & Swindon Biological Records Centre (WSBRC) provides a central reference point for environmental information on geology, habitats, sites and species in the County of Wiltshire and the Borough of Swindon.

Based within the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's headquarters in Devizes, the Records Centre is managed by the Trust as a partnership whose current members include Natural England, all the local authorities, Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society (WANHS) and the County Recorders.

A small team of staff and volunteers ensure that environmental records collected by a wide range of different organisations and individuals are brought together in one place, checked and processed to provide an overall picture of the county's natural environment. By continually updating this information, we can monitor the changing status and distribution of both habitats and species.

The information is used to ensure that important areas for wildlife are taken into account when considering plans for new developments and that environmental organisations are able to target their resources more effectively. Information supplied by the Records Centre also supports both the Wiltshire and the Swindon Biodiversity Action Plans by helping to identify those habitats and species that require priority action.

Our records come from a number of different sources. Some information comes from paid surveyors in different organisations but most species records are collected by volunteers. A network of approved volunteer experts, the County Recorders, provide us with most specialist records but we also rely upon general recorders to keep us up-to-date on what is happening in the county.

Recording Wiltshire's Biodiversity

We encourage the submission of any wildlife records, from Frogs to Puffballs and from Robins to Water Voles. Just because a species is not rare that does not mean that we are not interested in recording its presence. If the WSBRC

does not have the data then we can not tell what is present or absent in any given area, and hence can not advise local government, consultants, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust or local recorders amongst others. Every planning application in Wiltshire is screened by the W&SBRC for noted species, the more information we have for a site, the more we can advise the planner.

Recording

You can record any species that you see. Recording some species may be more difficult than other, for example mammals are often elusive and most are at their most active throughout the night. This means that you rarely see live mammals but mammals leave signs of their presence. Badgers will often follow the same paths each night on their foraging trips. If you see a path through vegetation that would seem impossible for a human to have made it is worth scouting around and looking for latrines (piles of dung that act as territory markers) or on barbed wire where you might find a few hairs. There are many books on this subject you will find some listed in the recommended reading section. Mammals are of course not the only animals that leave signs, birds build nests and broken egg shells that may help you deduce what species made it. It is like being a nature detective.

When you are trying to record difficult species it is often important to think about; what type of habitat you are in, is that species normally found in this type of habitat? What time of year is it? If the species is migratory will it already have left on its winter migration? What is the species distribution? Are they usually found in this part of the country?

Having a good guidebook is also important, you will find examples of some in the recommended reading section.

Lastly only record species that you are confident about identifying. If you have a good camera it is always worth taking photos, which you can then send into the County Recorders for verification.

If you are not sure of the specific species it is always worth noting the group from which the species came. For example you may see a bat flying over, there are 17 species in the UK and all are protected by law so even if you can not record the particular species it is still important to know that Bats are present in an area.

Be safe

As a member of the public you carry out these surveys at your own risk but we do recommend that you always go out in pairs and that you carry a mobile phone with you in case of an emergency.

Getting started...

Firstly it is important to know what information is essential for a record to be valid. As a minimum you must record the 4 Ws –

- Who** - your name
Where - grid reference, postcode or detailed description (a sketch map can be really useful)
When - date and time and
What - the species you saw (if you are not confident with identification you can send in photos)

and then any other relevant information including a note of numbers, interesting behaviour, gender, age or weather.

Submitting your records

You may keep a notepad on you to jot down sightings when you see them you then write them up when you get back home. If you are confident with using computers you can download a recording form from the WSBRC website. You can either print out a copy or download and fill it in digitally and email a copy back to the WSBRC.

You will find some recording forms enclosed with this pack for you to fill out and send back as hard copies. If you prefer to record species in this way then please contact the WSBRC for further copies.

Another option is to purchase MapMate (a cheap software package designed to make entering records easy) which is compatible with our own database.

Check out the 'on-line' recording form under 'your records' on the WSBRC web site www.wsbrc.org.uk for any rare or unusual sightings.

If you have any queries or require further information or copies, do not hesitate to contact the WSBRC at the Trust, where someone will be able to help you.

Please send all your records back once a year (perhaps at the end of the season), as it makes it easier for us to efficiently enter your records into the database.

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