

DERC



Dorset Environmental Records Centre



© Bryan Edwards

Annual Report 2015/16

Registered Charity Number 900287

Company Number 2447393

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

Registered in England as Dorset Environmental Records Centre Trust Company Limited
Reg. Office: DERC, Dorset History Centre, Bridport Road, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1RP
Registered Charity No. 900287 Registered Company No. 2447393 VAT Registration No. 834 5747 06

Chairman's Report for 2015/16

The Annual Report is an important document for it fulfils our obligations as a Charity and also is a gauge of our successes and failures. This is where loss of important staff, a financial crisis or a serious decline in recording would be reported. However once again I am pleased to say that none of these is reported here, in fact the opposite. Over the last five years or so I have touched upon uncertainties and the possibility that we may find ourselves having to tighten our purse strings and yet again the Annual Report affirms that DERC is in a strong financial and administrative position. The wealth of projects DERC touches upon and the number of records it receives reflects the health of the organisation and the quality of the staff and their professional liaison with the public and other bodies. Bryan Edwards continues to provide high quality surveying on many projects including Portland Living Landscape, Broadcroft Quarry and Breach Plantation. Jon Corkill gave a presentation of some of his work to the Trustees reminding us of the importance of the quality and reliability of the database work he and Alison Stewart are involved with on a daily basis. Under the close management of Carolyn Steele, the careful administration of Rhiannon Rogers and the generous and knowledgeable input of the Trustees it is not surprising that the team have brought DERC into its 40th year of existence in great shape.

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.

Local Recorders and Volunteers

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 Invertebrate Recording Group, Dorset's Important Geological Sites Group and Dorset Flora Group.

DERC also contributes to publications and articles. 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. DERC benefits from regular volunteer assistance and would like to thank all volunteers, in particular Bruce Willatt and Natalie Ferris.

The Record Resource

During the year a further 96,000+ records have been added to our Recorder 6 database. These included an update of fungi records, Dorset Flora Group records in preparation for a new national atlas and further records from the Cyril Diver Project. Over 40% of the records processed were verified records received from Living Record. The total number of records on the database at the end of March was 2,907,405.

Requests for Data

During 2015/16 the Record Centre responded to 257 requests for information about species or habitats in the county. The proportion of requests from commercial users increased to approximately 68%, requests from agreement holders remained low at 16% and 15% of requests were from private individuals/conservation organisations. Much of our data is provided directly to local authorities, statutory agencies and conservation organisations as GIS data through the Dorset Biodiversity Information System or as species data on the NBN Gateway. This data will be used thousands of times during the year.

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. All local authorities, except North Dorset District Council, were updated with site boundaries for Sites of Nature Conservation Interest, Local Geological Sites, Local Nature Reserves, Conservation Verges and Habitat Restoration Sites.

Dorset Habitat Layer

The Dorset Habitat Layer has data from a variety of surveys, including SSCI surveys & 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 County Council, Dorset Wildlife Trust and several local authorities through the Dorset Biodiversity Information System.

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

Dorset Marine Biodiversity Database

Unfortunately, the Marine Survey & Data Officer post at Dorset Wildlife Trust has not been retained following a review of the marine section. DERC are currently discussing future updates for the database with DWT. The database currently holds 76,207 species records and 5,120 habitat records.

Living Record – on-line recording for Dorset

DERC has continued to work with Adrian Bicker and the recording groups to extend the use of Living Record in Dorset. An amazing 127,193 new records were added to Living Record during the year, bringing the total number of Dorset records collected via this online recording system to 373,200. Although the Living Record project funded by the Patsy Wood Trust has now finished Living Record continues to be used widely by southern counties and further development is planned.

DERC contracts

DERC, in conjunction with Footprint Futures, collated data for a desktop study of the Lower Stour Valley to determine whether a large-scale accessible green space can be created alongside the conurbation in south-east Dorset, an area subject to increasing development pressure. The report included a set of maps relating to a broad range of issues that are relevant to the Lower Stour Valley, such as national flood zones, land ownership and conservation designations and will be used to determine the area of the Regional or Local Nature Park.

Biodiversity data from 2014 and 2015 has been extracted from Dorset County Council Biodiversity Mitigation Plans (BMP) and added to the DERC database. These BMPs have become a valuable resource for collecting data, particularly on protected species, across the county.

DERC has created a series of maps for the Puddletown Road area, near Wareham. This area is important for sand and gravel extraction and the maps provide information about land ownership, management and quarry phases as well as habitats and species to help with monitoring restoration post-mineral extraction at these sites. It could provide a useful model for other sites across Dorset.

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 South East Dorset. The current partnership includes local authorities, emergency services, wildlife organisations and government bodies. DERC's role in the project is to manage the incident records coming in, to disseminate fire records from the Dorset Fire and Rescue Service (DFRS) 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 have 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 483, more incidents recorded than at any other site).

Dorset's Important Geological Sites Group

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. DIGS members have been involved in conservation work at several Local Geological Sites (LGS), details of which can be found on the DIGS website <http://www.dorsetrigs.org.uk/>.

Public Benefit

In 2015/16 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 2015/16 (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 their work or links to recording group websites and promotes workshops and walks available to group members and members of the public.

DERC regularly adds biodiversity data to the NBN Gateway which is available to all through their website, <http://www.nbn.org.uk>. Data is also provided free of charge (other than for large projects) to certain sectors, including members of the public, students and researchers.

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.

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.

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.

DERC Trustees and employees

Trustees

Lyn Cooch	(Dorset County Council)
Kevin Cook	(Chairman)
Jennifer Cripps	(Dorset Natural History & Archaeological Society)
Imogen Davenport	(Dorset Wildlife Trust)
John Davis	(Butterfly Conservation)
Annabel King	(Dorset County Council)
John Newbould	(Dorset Natural History & Archaeological Society)
Nicholas Squirrell	(on behalf of Natural England)
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

Finances:

DERC made a profit of £31,655 in the year to 31 March 2016. This has provided an opportunity to increase staff salaries and for DERC to invest in the automation of data searches, making the process more efficient and keeping costs down. Copies of the Report of the Directors and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2016 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 County Council, Bournemouth Borough Council, Christchurch Borough Council, Poole Borough Council, Purbeck District Council, West Dorset District Council, East Dorset District Council, Weymouth and Portland Borough Council, Environment Agency, Wessex Water, Dorset Wildlife Trust and the final year of MoA funding from Natural England.

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 holds 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 2016 continued to provide a good and reliable information and survey service with no significant changes or developments during the year. At 31st March 2016, reserves held by the company were £211,192, 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.

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 2016.