



Autumn and winter is a good time for naturalists, who are invariably too busy during the spring and summer months, to check their notebooks and send in any new data to DERC. For those who use Living Record, we are very pleased to announce that Excel spreadsheets can now be imported to Living Record, a function that will be very useful for long lists of species. There are guidance notes to help you through the process so do have a go (livingrecord.net). Living Record has collected over 100,000 records each year over the past few years, over half a million for Dorset so far, and that looks likely to increase as Living Record is used by more groups and conservation organisations.

Those of you who have followed the work of DERC staff and volunteers may remember a project to extract data from the Good Archive – Professor Good's botanical survey from the 1930s. Good marked his sites (or stands) on a set of 2nd Edition OS maps and these were digitised as part of the project. We have now made them publically available through Dorset Explorer (explorer.geowessex.com), just tick Good Stands, under Environmental Records in the Layer Control. You can even see them over the original map base by selecting Second Edition under OS Historic Maps and, for some sites, see how the habitat has changed using the aerial photography layers.

Processing data can take a long time, particularly older data as Alison explains below. Sometimes it is the only way to get a real feel for how things have changed, which species were common and what is new. But, large recording projects are not just a thing of the past, John's article on Golden Cap highlights a current project which has already produced many exciting new records with the help from both experts and volunteers.

Carolyn Steele (Records Centre Manager)

Studland Heath NNR Archive

Many years ago, staff at Natural England provided DERC with a set of 13 index card boxes that needed to be moved to make space in their offices. These contained flora and fauna records covering 26 years from 1969 to 1994, almost all hand-written by the Studland Heath warden for much of that time, Rees Cox. His own records and those of other reserve volunteers and visiting naturalists formed a valuable archive from this important area.

However, processing these older datasets is not always straightforward. Although DERC found a number of volunteers to extract the records into Excel spreadsheets over several years, other priorities always got in the way of finishing the compilation. With the recent Cyril Diver Project also covering the Studland area, this seemed the appropriate time to complete the work, giving an insight into the wildlife from another time period. Many more hours were required to check that the correct interpretation of the records had been made before we could add the final dataset of over 14,000 records to the database.



Southern Hawker
(*Aeshna cyanea*)



Small red damselfly
(*Ceriagrion tenellum*)



Heath grasshopper
(*Chorthippus vagans*)

Photos © Bryan Edwards

It is evident from the detailed comments that accompany many of the records that Rees was out and about on the reserve most days, recording on survey transects, engaging with visitors and leading school trips. There are various comments about grass snakes being caught to show school groups, before releasing the specimens back where they were found. Years before Spring Watch was on our screens, specimens were being collected for TV filming; on one occasion in 1984, a full-grown emperor moth larva was collected for a TV crew to film the next day - but it pupated overnight! On another occasion, 60 palmate newts were picked off the road as the last ferry traffic was due. And the species recorded most often in the archive, the Adder!

Alison Stewart
(Database Manager) &
Rhiannon Rogers
(Finance & Administration Officer)





The National Trust's Golden Cap Estate

The Golden Cap estate is one of the largest areas of land in single ownership within the West Dorset Coast SSSI, stretching from Eype in the east to Lyme Regis in the west, with an outlying area on the western part of Hardown Hill, which falls within the Morecombelake SSSI. There are over 170 fields (comprising the National Trust's largest unit of neutral grassland in England and Wales), woods, hedges, heathland and the coastal soft cliffs.

The National Trust has a national biological survey team, increasingly supplemented by property-based staff and volunteer ecologists, which aims to produce an assessment on acquisition of a property followed by subsequent visits at intervals of 12-20 years. The author is a volunteer specialist working with the national team to re-survey the estate and also collate information from visiting naturalists who may have supplied their findings to DERC, the National Trust or a national recording scheme.

The nationally important soft cliffs have long been a draw for expert entomologists with reports produced for organisations such as BugLife and other commissioned surveys, but nobody has collated all the information gathered into a comprehensive assessment. One aim of the current survey is to produce such a report. It is a fantastic area: Bryan Edwards has looked at some of the bare ground and found rare lichens; ponds below Westhay Farm have both palmate and greater crested newt; and wet flushes have Marsh Helleborine (*Epipactis palustris*) and Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*) whilst Slender Centaury (*Centaurium tenuiflorum*) is found at its only place in mainland Britain. Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*) breed below Golden Cap and in the autumn, both Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) and House Martin (*Delichon urbicum*) are often seen in good numbers before heading across the channel.

For the past twelve months, we have had the use of two Anabat Express bat detectors deployed on the estate recording the movements of the bat population. Ten species have been recorded including two roosts of Lesser Horseshoe Bats (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*) and roosts of Common Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) in buildings and trees. Other bats may be using the hedgerows to feed or in some cases just passing through. Other small mammals are recorded by sight or using Longworth traps.

The vast majority of the fields are managed by grazing with many tenant farmers using sheep and cattle. Where possible we try to increase biodiversity by negotiating with our tenants to manage for wildlife. The meadows around Westhay

Farm, for example, are not cut for hay until late July/August, followed by aftermath grazing by cattle, resulting in a fine display of Green-winged

Orchid (*Anacamptis morio*). Two of the fields usually produce around 100,000 spikes in late April and May and may be viewed from public footpaths without damaging the hay crop. Many fields also have the diminutive Autumn Lady's-tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*) sometimes in large numbers depending on, we believe, rainfall in August. Wet flushes have a number of species such as Marsh Ragwort (*Senecio aquaticus*) and Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*) which now appear on the Red List for England. With many wet flushes we would expect to see wintering Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*), but we have few records.

During the autumn, migrating Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) follow the cattle, feeding up before commencing their journey.

In the autumn of 2016, our volunteers recorded fungi such as waxcaps in the acid grassland fields around Golden Cap. Bryan Edwards assessed the results, finding the fields surveyed to be of national importance.

Lowland heath is mainly found on Hardown Hill, Stonebarrow and Chardown Hill. It is a problem area in terms of management as Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) often invades open areas whilst gorse needs rotational management. Dorset Notable plant species such as Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*) and Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) do well, whilst heather responds to bracken management. The gorse is important for bird species such as Linnet (*Linaria cannabina*), Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella*) and Dartford Warbler (*Sylvia undata*). Have you seen Dartford Warbler here in the past few years? If so, please let us know, our last recorded sighting was in 2010.

If you would like to volunteer we have a regular volunteer survey day on Tuesdays, contact Gemma Baron at Gemma.baron@nationaltrust.org.uk

Finally, a word of warning: **do not venture onto the cliffs alone. They are dangerous.**

John Newbould

(DERC trustee and National Trust volunteer recorder)

