

# NatureNews

CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

## Chairman's Introduction

### *A State of Change*

#### ~ IN THIS ISSUE ~

Inside this issue you'll find features on some of the key areas of work where JNCC is making a special contribution to nature conservation in the UK, Europe and internationally.

2005 sees the beginning of the publication of *Species Status*, which assigns conservation status to our flora and fauna. One of the first in this series, *The Vascular Plant Red Data List for Great Britain* shows serious declines in a considerable number of what were once considered widespread species.

The Tracking Mammals Partnership published its first major report on UK mammal population trends. Covering over 50% of UK land mammals, the report shows that there are both winners and losers. Meanwhile the UK Red Squirrel Group has launched a new website, designed to communicate and deliver positive conservation action for one of the UK's most threatened mammals.

JNCC and the Convention on Biological Diversity secretariat have created the web-based *Ecosystem Approach Sourcebook*, which provides a tool to implement the ecosystem approach and share experiences from existing projects. The ecosystem approach is recognised as an important instrument for enhancing sustainable development and alleviating poverty.

These are just some of the areas where JNCC is making a real difference in the UK, in Europe and internationally. Further details on these and other initiatives can be found in the following pages.

JNCC has set up a company limited by guarantee, a not-for-profit organisation, quite common in the public sector, and is delivering its responsibilities through this company.

The **JNCC Support Co** now employs the staff previously assigned to JNCC's Support Unit from the country agencies (English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Council for Wales) and holds and manages funds and assets on behalf of JNCC. The company will be responsible for developing and delivering JNCC's corporate and business plans. JNCC is also now able to receive funding directly from Government, in addition to its primary funding route through the country agencies.

These changes are part of a package of measures aimed at improving the organisation's efficiency and service delivery, and arise from the Government review of JNCC in January 2002. The changes were enabled by amendment to JNCC's founding legislation, the Environmental Protection Act 1990, through the Regulatory Reform (Joint Nature Conservation Committee) Order 2005, which came into force on 31st March.

The benefits of the changes are a reduction in the level of administration concerned with staff management, removal of substantial pay anomalies, and enabling JNCC to retain its highly-skilled workforce. It also enables Government to obtain services from JNCC in a more flexible and transparent manner, and reduces the level of administration concerned with the organisation acquiring the services and facilities needed to deliver its statutory functions efficiently.

Whilst its operational arrangements will change, the basic relationship between JNCC and the country agencies remains the same.



*The attractive corn buttercup used to be a common site in arable fields throughout England. In the last 40 years it has been lost from more than 80% of its range, and the new Vascular Plant Red Data List considers it to be Critically Endangered, the highest level of threat. Modern farming practices have seriously affected many of our familiar arable plants, but the decline is hopefully being slowed by agri-environment schemes © Peter Wakely/English Nature*

The agency Councils/Board still nominate members to the Joint Committee, and JNCC continues to receive the majority of its funding via the country agencies. JNCC is still a public sector body and the arrangements for its staff have been established on this basis; for instance staff are members of the Civil Service Pension Scheme.

It is intended that the final changes arising from the Government review of JNCC will be enabled by provisions in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill. The prospective changes to JNCC under this Bill include extending JNCC's remit from Great Britain to the United Kingdom, and increasing by two the number of independent members appointed to JNCC by the Secretary of State.

Adrian Darby OBE  
Chairman, JNCC

# High marks for Annual Report

JNCC's drive to make its messages more accessible to a wider audience received further recognition, with our *Annual Report 2003/2004* achieving two major accolades. For the second year running, the Report was crowned the Public Service Annual Report/Review of the Year at the annual 'Popcomms' – the Charity and Public Service Publishing Awards.

The ceremony, once more at the Rembrandt Hotel, South Kensington, held on the 22nd February, was the 13th Annual Ceremony in the history of the Awards - but it certainly was not unlucky 13 for JNCC!

In accepting the Award, JNCC Communications Manager Alex Geairns noted "From never having even been shortlisted last year and then winning, and to be shortlisted again in 2005, was completely unexpected. To win two years out of two is completely unprecedented for us. We take the attitude that our Report is more than just end of year figures, it's actually an excellent mechanism to garner popular support for the work we do."

The reporting judge at the ceremony reserved particular praise for the 'furry' cover, which people cannot resist stroking!



Celebrating another award win at the 2005 CiB awards © CiB

The *Annual Report* also received recognition at the 2005 CiB Awards, organised by the British Association of Communicators in Business. The Ceremony, held on 27th May in Manchester, marked the first time that one of our publications had received an 'Award of Excellence' in "Europe's biggest and most prestigious competition for printed and online business communications"

– a contest that has been running for over 50 years. We were recognised in the 'Financial Publications – Public Sector' category.

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Alison Averis receiving the BSBI and Wildflower Society award © Alex Lockton

## Vegetation Adulation

A prestigious prize for Britain's best botanical book of the year has been awarded to the six authors of *An Illustrated Guide to British Upland Vegetation*, published by JNCC. The book was selected by the Presidents of the Botanical Society of the British Isles (BSBI) and the Wildflower Society, for its accessible style and comprehensive summary of upland vegetation in Britain. It is the only book of its kind to summarise Britain's upland plant communities, with detailed descriptions of 99 vegetation types, an indication of what each vegetation type looks like, where it occurs, and how it can be distinguished from related types.

The book aims to focus attention on the nature, diversity and importance of the vegetation, but it also provides a baseline to measure future changes, such as climate change and shifts in agriculture and forestry. Alpine vegetation types such as snow-bed plant communities which are found in Scotland's high mountain areas, for example, are likely to be particularly vulnerable to climate change, as late-lying snow may disappear.

*An Illustrated Guide to British Upland Vegetation* by Alison Averis, Ben Averis, John Birks, David Horsfield, Des Thompson and Marcus Yeo, is priced at £25 plus postage and packing (£15 with proof of student status) from NHBS at [www.nhbs.com/catalogue/display/t=132273](http://www.nhbs.com/catalogue/display/t=132273) or phone +44 (0) 1803 865913.

# Sounding off((shore))))

## Mapping the seabed with cutting-edge technology

The UK offshore area (from 12nm out to the UK Continental Shelf limit) is vast, being over 2.5 times the size of the land area (see Figure 1). Most of this area is unexplored and unmapped in terms of the habitats and species present. However, under the EU Habitats Directive the UK Government has a duty to protect and preserve areas of conservation interest. The JNCC Marine Sites and Strategy Team (MSST) have been charged with the task of advising Defra on possible locations for Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) within this immense area. Using very coarse data from the British Geological Society on seabed type, the MSST have identified areas that may qualify as Annex I habitat\*.

One such broad area lies off the north-west coast of Scotland. In summer 2004 the MSST set up a project in collaboration with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the Department for Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Northern Ireland (DARDNI) and the National Oceanography Centre, Southampton to survey a number of areas west of the Hebrides and investigate the species and habitats present.



Figure 1 – The UK offshore area

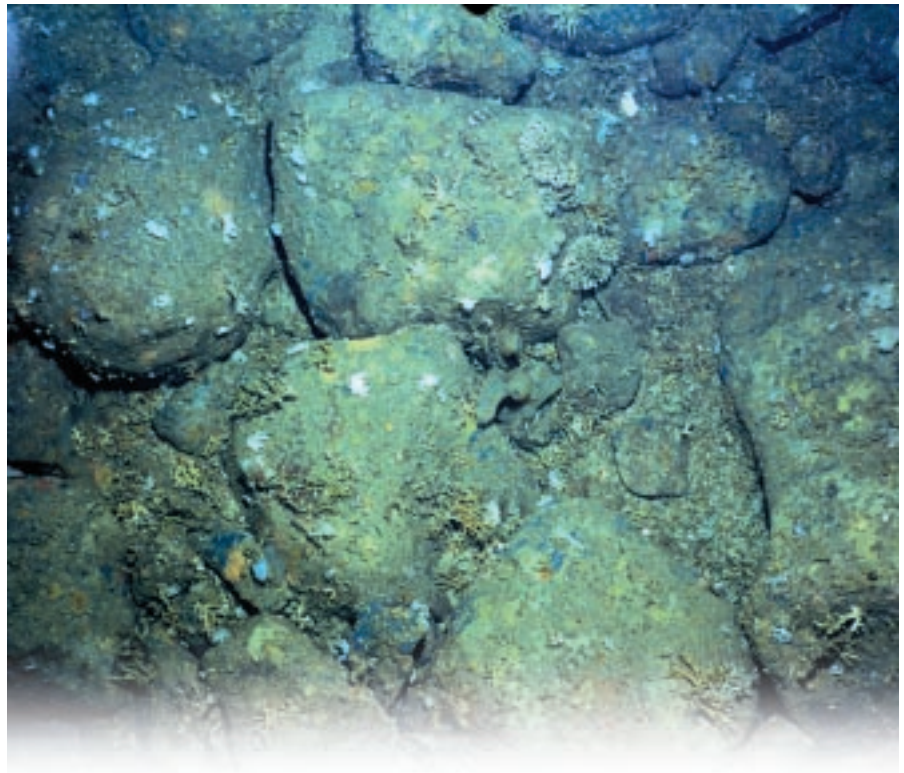


Figure 3 – Photograph of the seabed showing boulder areas fringing the bedrock outcrops shown in Figure 2.

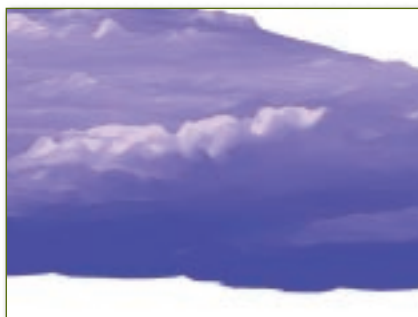


Figure 2 – Multibeam echosounder acoustic 'picture' of the seabed. Lighter areas are bedrock outcrops from the sea floor.

The project used the DARDNI research vessel *Lough Foyle*, and a second vessel *Aora* from the Marine Research Station at Millport, to explore five areas classed as bedrock reef under the EU Habitats Directive. The cruises were largely successful, although bad weather, a frequent problem when working offshore, restricted the amount of work possible. A sophisticated multibeam echosounder was used to acoustically visualise the highs, lows and slopes of the seabed (Figure 2) and its texture, for example, roughness and hardness. Based on this acoustic map of seabed type,

a video and stills camera array was then used to look at the species and habitats present on different types of seabed (Figure 3).

The acoustic and video/photo data is combined using Geographical Information Systems software to produce a habitat map of the areas surveyed. This information can then be used to assess each of the sites in turn for their conservation value and whether or not they are suitable as a possible location for a SAC.

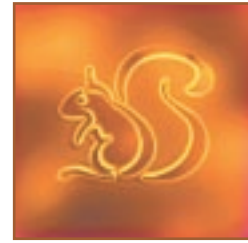
MSST, working closely with SNH, hopes to complete the assessment of this area in early 2006.

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\* Annex I habitat is habitat that is listed in Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive. The habitats listed are natural habitat types of European Community interest whose conservation requires the designation of Special Areas of Conservation.

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# Cyber squirrel



**The red squirrel has a new website dedicated to improving the links between the local, regional and UK red squirrel groups, and to communicate and deliver positive conservation action for one of the UK's most threatened mammal species.**

*Red squirrel Sciurus vulgaris © Lorne Gill/SNH*

The UK Red Squirrel Group (UKRSG) is the lead partner for the red squirrel Biodiversity Action Plan, and through its advisory and co-ordination roles, aims to reduce or stop the rate of red squirrel decline through implementation of this Plan. JNCC acts as the Secretariat for the group, and is hosting this website to fulfil the role of communication, education and raising awareness of the work to save this native species.

The website provides information to the general public on red squirrels, including facts such as historical change and current distribution, details on the threat from grey squirrels and disease, and what is being done to conserve red squirrels including protecting 'priority woodlands'. The site also provides detailed information on how the UKRSG operates, its key work areas and research progress, as well as bringing all the current best practice guidance for red squirrel conservation and site management into one place.

The principal threat to red squirrel survival is thought to be the sustained expansion of non-native grey squirrel populations, and with them the potential of squirrel poxvirus transmission. A future plan of the UKRSG is to enhance awareness of the threat of grey squirrels in continental Europe before they spread out from their introduction sites in Northern Italy. In countries where grey squirrel populations are well

established, collaborative initiatives are underway. For example, the Northern Ireland Squirrel Group and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Republic of Ireland, are looking into developing an All Ireland Red Squirrel Action Plan, and work will continue to raise awareness of this issue at other European fora, such as the Bern Convention.

In order to provide advice in Europe we need to assess the effectiveness of conservation management practices across the UK, to gauge the spread of grey squirrels into red squirrel areas and to monitor the rate of change of red squirrel populations. JNCC and the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) are jointly funding a study to meet these needs, investigating the best methods to develop an effective national squirrel surveillance scheme, under the auspices of the Tracking Mammals Partnership.

For more information, and to view the UKRSG website, please visit

[www.ukredsquirrels.org](http://www.ukredsquirrels.org)

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# UK mammals - winners and losers

A first for UK mammals: population trends for more than half of all UK species

The Tracking Mammals Partnership (TMP) has recently published the first major report on UK mammal population trends. The report assesses population change for 33 species and one subspecies, representing over 50% of land mammals in the UK. Analysis shows that 40% of natives are increasing, 12% are declining, 16% have stable populations and for 32% the trends are unclear at present, with more years of data required before population change can

be assessed reliably. For non-natives, 66% are increasing, 11% are declining and 22% have stable populations.

TMP is a collaborative initiative involving 24 organisations, which aims to provide good quality data to guide conservation and wildlife management policy for mammals, through standardising survey design, assessing where information is missing,



**UK Mammals: Species Status and Population Trends.** First report by the Tracking Mammals Partnership

Natives	Non-natives	Population change since mid 1990s
Greater horseshoe bat, lesser horseshoe bat, Natterer's bat, Daubenton's bat, common pipistrelle, polecat, badger, otter, red deer, roe deer	Grey squirrel, common rat, sika deer, fallow deer, muntjac, Chinese water deer	Increasing
Mountain hare, common dormouse, water vole	Rabbit	Declining
Mole, whiskered bat, Brandt's bat, soprano pipistrelle	Brown hare, mink	No change
Hedgehog, serotine, noctule, brown long-eared bat, fox, stoat, weasel, Irish hare (subspecies of mountain hare found only in Ireland)		More information required to produce reliable trends

exchanging data and expertise, and sharing best practice and information. There is also co-operation to recruit, train and support the network of volunteers who carry out the surveys.

The data are being collected in a programme of 17 surveillance schemes, with over 14,000 volunteers currently taking part every year, carrying out over 140,000 hours of survey work and covering more than 16,500 survey sites across the UK. The estimated value of the time given by volunteers is in the region of £4.5 million a year, and shows the vital contribution they make to the success of mammal monitoring. The Partnership plans to introduce new surveillance schemes over the next few years for as many of the remaining land mammal species as possible.

UK Mammals: Species Status and Population Trends. First Report by the Tracking Mammals Partnership. The report is available through NHBS, price £7.00, on +44 (0) 1803 865913 or at [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com)

The report can also be downloaded free from the TMP website at [www.trackingmammals.org](http://www.trackingmammals.org)

The Partnership has produced an eight page leaflet on the work of TMP, which is being distributed to all volunteers.

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Summary leaflet for volunteers on the first report by the TMP

# Status *matters!*

This year JNCC has produced a new publication series: *Species Status*. This series is the public face of the Species Status Assessment project, which assigns conservation status to our flora and fauna using the internationally approved IUCN Red Data List criteria and categories. Some volumes include detailed data sheets, giving biological and other information relevant for conserving each species, while others list the new conservation status assigned to each species, with supporting reasons and evidence for these judgments. The task of assessing a given taxonomic group is done by those with the best understanding of the group being looked at: the natural historians, researchers and recorders who want to help understand and conserve our living world.

One of the first publications, issued in April 2005, was Cheffings, CM and Farrell, L (Eds) (2005) *The Vascular Plant Red Data List for Great Britain*. Species Status 7: 1-116. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

This publication is a complete new analysis of the state of British flora. The new Red List shows that 20% of plants are threatened, with a further 5% near threatened. This is the first time that an attempt has been made to assess the threat for all plant species, including those that are currently widespread. We now have definitive statistics that demonstrate serious declines in a considerable number of what were considered widespread species. The analysis caught the attention of the media, and JNCC appeared in all of the major broadsheet newspapers and television channels.

Four key messages have been derived from the data so far:

- Upland plants are declining due to overgrazing.
- Arable plants have almost disappeared in large parts of the country.
- Plants of unimproved grassland are disappearing. Many are restricted to small fragments such as roadsides, and these are under severe pressure.
- As a nation, we have been very successful at looking after our rarest species, but very poor at preventing widespread species suffering severe declines.

The main task now is to translate the findings of the new plant Red List into changes in policy affecting plant conservation. During 2005, botanists will be considering how best to use the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Review of Priority Species to achieve positive action for threatened plant species. It will also be vital that the Red List



*The Vascular Plant Red Data List for Great Britain*

findings are used in planning and assessing agri-environment schemes. The most important change that needs to be made is a shift in focus to concentrate more on halting and reversing the loss of previously common and familiar species. Achieving this goal will be a massive challenge, and can only happen through changing the policies for countryside management. However, with the improved understanding presented in the report, we can be optimistic that we know where to focus our efforts.

The report was produced by a group comprising botanists from all of the country agencies, JNCC, the Biological Records Centre (part of the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology), the Botanical Society of the British Isles, Plantlife International, the Natural History Museum, and the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. Approximately two and a quarter million records were analysed from the last 70 years, with most records being made by volunteer efforts.

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*Gentianella campestris* (L.) Börner © F. Rumsey

## Two other titles have also been issued in the series. These are:

Falk, SJ and Chandler, PJ (2005) *A review of the scarce and threatened flies of Great Britain. Part 2: Nematocera and Aschiza*. Species Status 2: 1-189. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

Falk, SJ and Crossley, R (2005) *A review of the scarce and threatened flies of Great Britain. Part 3: Empidoidea*. Species Status 3: 1-134. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

Look out for future publications in this series including major reviews of macro-moths and water-beetles, and a revision of spider conservation status.

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Species Status volumes can be purchased as paper publications from NHBS on +44 (0) 1803 865913, at a cost of £15 plus p&p, or see [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com)

The volumes can also be downloaded free from the JNCC website at [www.jncc.gov.uk/page-3352](http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-3352)



Other new or forthcoming titles in the Species Status Series

## Share and enjoy!

### *JNCC and CBD Secretariat put Ecosystem Approach Sourcebook online*

JNCC and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Secretariat have created the web-based *Ecosystem Approach Sourcebook*. The sourcebook provides a tool to implement the ecosystem approach and share experiences from existing projects. It includes a database of case studies presenting lessons learnt from around the world.

The publication was created in response to a request by CBD's Conference of Parties, at their seventh meeting in February 2004. The final version of the *Sourcebook* will include, in addition to the case study database, information about the ecosystem approach, and the various tools and techniques that can be used to implement it.

This approach can be used as a tool to ensure the integrated management of land, water and living resources, whilst promoting conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way. It has been recognised by the World Summit on Sustainable Development as an important instrument for enhancing sustainable development and poverty alleviation.



*Passiflora coccinea* (red passionflower) growing at Iwokrama, Guyana where nearly one million acres of tropical forest is managed to provide ecological, social and economic benefits to local, national and international communities © Diana Mortimer/JNCC

The development of the *Sourcebook* now requires the addition of case studies to the database. Case studies can be on any subject which contributes to the goals of the CBD. Submitting case studies is easy to do, and in turn you can use the database to learn from others. If you know of any which provide examples from which others can learn, please go and visit:

[www.biodiv.org/programmes/cross-cutting/ecosystem/sourcebook/home.shtml](http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/cross-cutting/ecosystem/sourcebook/home.shtml)

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# Facts on *falling feathers*

Black-legged kittiwakes were badly affected by sandeel shortages in 2004 © Matt Parsons



As highlighted in the previous issue of *Nature News*, 2004 was the worst breeding season on record for some of the UK's commonest seabirds. The full results of the JNCC's Seabird Monitoring Programme, in collaboration with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group have just been published in *Seabird numbers and breeding success in Britain and Ireland, 2004*.

The report, produced annually, presents the results of monitoring of seabird populations and breeding performance throughout Britain and Ireland in 2004 and makes comparisons with previous years.

Copies of the publication are available through NHBS, price £10 at [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) A PDF of the report can be downloaded from the JNCC website at [www.jncc.gov.uk/page-2143](http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-2143)



*Seabird numbers and breeding success in Britain and Ireland, 2004*

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This is one of a range of publications published by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. JNCC advises the UK Government on national and international wildlife and conservation issues on behalf of the Countryside Council for Wales, English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Environment and Heritage Service, Northern Ireland.

*Nature News* is published three times a year, and informs its readers of the current work and projects being carried out by JNCC. Comment and feedback is much appreciated, so please email: [communications@jncc.gov.uk](mailto:communications@jncc.gov.uk), tel: +44 (0) 1733 866839, fax: +44 (0) 1733 555948 or write to: JNCC, Monkstone House, City Road, Peterborough PE1 1JY, UK.

You can find out more about the work of the JNCC by visiting our website at [www.jncc.gov.uk](http://www.jncc.gov.uk)

ISSN 1479-3857

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Printed on Evolution Satin, 75% recycled post-consumer waste paper, Elemental Chlorine Free.

Designed and printed by Status Design & Advertising, 2M.