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**JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE**

**REPORT ON THE EFFECTS OF THE 2001 FOOT AND MOUTH EPIDEMIC UPON  
JNCC PROGRAMMES**

**Paper by Ian McLean**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in Britain in 2001 had significant impacts on JNCC work programmes. A paper to the March 2001 Joint Committee (JNCC 01 N05) gave an initial report and assessment, and advised that work programmes for major biological survey and monitoring programmes should be modified, while at the same time keeping to planned budgets. A short progress report to the September 2001 Joint Committee (JNCC 01 N08) summarised the known effects on JNCC programmes up to that time, and predicted the likely effects on fieldwork projects in winter 2001/2002.
- 1.2 This paper summarises the known effects of FMD on JNCC programmes in 2001, and draws some conclusions from the way that the situation was handled and the attempts that were made by JNCC and partners to minimise the disruption to important long-term work.

**2. Summary of effects on JNCC programmes**

- 2.1 The effects on JNCC major contracts, largely for biological monitoring and surveillance projects, are summarised in Table 1. This shows that a wide range of projects was affected by FMD in 2001, the principal effect being loss of data due to sites being inaccessible, with some knock-on disruption to future years' programmes. All contractors had to spend substantial extra effort in communicating with volunteers and their co-ordinators so as to ensure compliance with official guidelines on countryside access. The reduction in fieldwork for some schemes also reduced recruitment of replacement and new volunteer recorders, and this may affect some projects in 2002.
- 2.2 The reduction in data captured during 2001 will affect the calculation of population measures and indices for some schemes. It is still too early to be able to quantify these effects, but for those long-term schemes, where the reduction or absence of results for a year is most damaging, it seems that few have lost so much data that their information for 2001 is seriously compromised.
- 2.3 The effects of FMD on JNCC key and corporate targets for 2001/02 are summarised in Table 2, which is abstracted from Annex 1 of the draft

corporate plan for 2002/03 (JNCC 02 P04). This lists the major direct impacts of FMD, although some other key and corporate targets were indirectly affected by time being diverted to deal with the outbreak. The delays caused by FMD will have some consequences for work planned for 2002/2003, but the effects of this are assessed to be small.

### **3. Lessons learned from managing the effects of FMD on JNCC programmes**

- 3.1 The strength of the partnerships between JNCC and those organisations who run major biological survey and monitoring programmes was evident in the way that the problems were tackled. Rapid and extensive communication at the early stages of the outbreak ensured that a consistent and co-ordinated approach was adopted to handling the situation. Considerable emphasis by JNCC and its partners upon strict adherence to Government guidelines and upon maintaining close consultation with landowners, was rewarded by no known problems arising between fieldworkers and owners or occupiers. The large volume of unplanned FMD-related work for staff in both JNCC and partner organisations caused disruption to other planned work, but this was recognised as being inevitable in the circumstances.
- 3.2 The decision to keep to planned contract budgets for all partnership programmes was vindicated by the outcomes achieved by this approach. The decision gave assurance and stability at a time of great strain to JNCC partners and enabled planning to proceed with more confidence. JNCC and its partners faced the problems caused by FMD together, and contractors were able to concentrate upon deciding which surveys could proceed and upon guiding volunteers and their co-ordinators in what was a complex and difficult situation. Finally, the approach enabled a long-term view to be taken of each scheme and its particular needs and issues without the additional challenge of changing budget allocations, which had already been set for the year.
- 3.3 Contract management and planning systems coped well with the additional demands placed upon them by the FMD crisis. Relations between JNCC and partners, and between these partners and the volunteer community (who collect the vast majority of data for biological survey and monitoring programmes) were shown to be strong and reliable under the pressure of a major national emergency. The use of the internet, to help with mass communication in short timescales, was proven to be a substantial asset in these circumstances, although direct communication with key individuals remained vital.

**Table 1. Summary of the effects of FMD on JNCC key contract programmes for biological surveillance and monitoring in 2001**

| <b>Programme</b>   | <b>Effects in 2001</b>  | <b>Long-term effects</b>  |
|--|---|---|
| BTO Breeding Bird Survey   | 565 squares completed (over 2,000 previous year); no new volunteers recruited; increased liaison time; saved data input time  | Need increased recruitment for 2002 (more time); reduced coverage will lead to some analysis and interpretation problems            |
| BTO Nest Record Scheme   | 17,000 records received (down from 22,000 previously); increased liaison time; good take-up of electronic record submission; increased liaison time; same size sample of records will be computerised | Small loss of data means long-term effects are not substantial for this scheme  |
| BTO Constant Effort Site (CES) Scheme                                  | Results expected for 110 sites in 2001, compared with 147 in 2000   | Significant, but not critical, loss of data   |
| BTO Retrapping Adults for Survival (RAS) Scheme                        | About 30% reduction in data compared with previous year   | Significant, but not critical, loss of data   |
| BTO Low Tide Counts  | Few February counts missed  | Little impact on this scheme  |
| BTO Ringing Scheme   | Too early to tell the reduction in number of birds ringed   | Cannot yet be assessed  |
| BTO Winter Farmland Survey   | Postponed third winter of fieldwork for one year  | One year delay in concluding this phase of the work   |
| BTO Peregrine Survey   | Postponed for one year  | One year delay in doing survey  |
| BTO Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows Survey                              | Postponed for one year  | One year delay in doing survey  |
| WWT/BTO Wetland Birds Survey   | WeBS core counts suspended in March 2001, resumed September 2001 (where permitted)  | Loss of counts, but for the least critical time of year   |
| WWT special surveys  | Mute Swan Census postponed for one year   | One year delay in doing survey  |
| Rare Breeding Birds Panel  | Some reduction in number of records submitted is expected; this will be known in 2003   | Coverage of some species may be significantly reduced   |
| Survey of seabird breeding colonies                                    | Some census work postponed  | One year delay in coverage of some areas  |
| BCT National Bat Monitoring Programme: colony counts                   | Just over 50% of the colonies counted in 2000 were counted in 2001  | Data insufficient to contribute to population trend analyses in the short term; adds a year to meet requirements for power analyses |
| BCT National Bat Monitoring Programme: field surveys                   | Less than 20% of the sites surveyed in 2000 were surveyed in 2001   | Data insufficient to contribute to population trend analyses in the short term; adds a year to meet requirements for power analyses |
| BCT National Bat Monitoring Programme: hibernation survey              | Counts were largely completed before the FMD outbreak, so minimal disruption  | Little loss of data   |
| CEH Butterfly Monitoring Scheme  | Lost nine sites out of 130, with many sites missing the early part of the season up to May-June   | Annual indices for spring species will be much less precise than hitherto   |
| Biological Records Centre: recording by national schemes and societies | Reduced level of recording apparent for some schemes  | Limited long-term effect of one year with less recording  |

**Table 2. The principal direct effects of FMD on delivery of JNCC key and corporate Targets**

| <b>Key targets (summary)</b>   | <b>Effect</b>  |
|--|--|
| 8. Produce UK-wide guidance for country conservation agencies on setting and assessing conservation objectives for habitat, species and earth science interest features on statutory sites | Field testing of the guidance was severely constrained by the foot and mouth outbreak. |
| 9. Maintain a national surveillance network for British bats   | Some survey work was not undertaken because of foot and mouth (see Table 1)            |
| 10. Complete the Seabird 2000 census of all breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland   | The foot and mouth outbreak caused the postponement of some census work                |
| <b>Corporate target (summary)</b>  | <b>Effect</b>  |
| 10. Formulate common standards and develop and test practical surveillance and monitoring methodologies for BAP habitats and species   | Some fieldwork was postponed until 2003 because of foot and mouth                      |