



UK BRAG report - 2007 and 2008

Introduction

The UK BRAG was set up in 2003 as a result of the Defra report *Science in Action for Biodiversity* (Defra, 2001), and its terms of reference were reviewed and revised in 2007. Its membership is drawn from a wide spectrum of organisations from the research, policy, and stakeholder communities in the UK that have a specialist interest in UK Biodiversity. The terms of reference and current membership list can be found on the website, www.ukbrag.org.uk.

The UK BRAG terms of reference include:

- Identifying, promoting and facilitating biodiversity research, to support UK and individual country action plan commitments, with reference to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the EU Biodiversity Strategy and associated initiatives.
- Coordinating UK engagement with European biodiversity research, and thus fulfilling the role of a national biodiversity research platform.
- Contributing to effective biodiversity research networking in the UK, including integrating natural sciences, economics and social sciences.
- Supporting knowledge transfer activities in relation to biodiversity research.

The terms of reference also clearly state that the UK BRAG does not act as a funding body for biodiversity research.

In its role as the UK Biodiversity Research Platform, UK BRAG is a key representative to the European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy (EPBRS) with members taking an active role in a variety of EPBRS meetings.

To fulfil its functions UK BRAG convenes specialist sub-groups on specific topics. Invited members of a sub-group then report back to the main UK BRAG. Agreed reports are all published on the website.

The last UK BRAG report covered the period 2003 – 2006. This report is to provide an update since then.

The UK Biodiversity Research Advisory Group
The UK Biodiversity Research Platform
www.ukbrag.org.uk

Mechanisms for filling knowledge gaps for Biodiversity Action Plan species: workshop held December 2008

On 4th and 5th December 2008, the Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group (BRIG), in conjunction with UK BRAG, jointly held a workshop.

This invitation-only event was to identify the key research and one-off survey signposting actions required to take forward the conservation of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority species. Peak Ecology Ltd was commissioned to organise the workshop, and to write up the results.

Oversight of the contract was managed by a Steering Group comprising Ant Maddock and Paul Rose (JNCC), in conjunction with Margaret Palmer (Wildlife and Countryside Link), and Deborah Long (Scottish Environment Link). This Steering Group represented the BRIG/BRAG research sub-group.



Photo: Ant Maddock with workshop participants © JNCC

The workshop was generously hosted by Natural England at their Peterborough offices and was attended by 30 experts from both NGOs and government agencies. The event fulfilled its aims of clarifying which signposted actions were genuine research or one-off survey actions for priority species, agreeing criteria for ranking these actions and for many taxa undertaking this ranking. Actions were also considered for grouping, for example by taxonomic or ecological character, so that multi-species research activities could be further considered.

All the experts that attended the workshop worked extremely hard to a very tight schedule to make it a success. The report of the workshop and accompanying appendix (a spreadsheet auditing decisions on individual actions) can be found by following the links on the front page of the UK BRAG website. Since the workshop, a sub-group of the UK BRAG has been established to consider and follow up the research actions identified.

BES/BRAG joint meetings: is biodiversity research leading to action? (2007) and ecosystem services (2008)



Since the 2007 joint British Ecological Society (BES)-BRAG session at the BES annual meeting in Glasgow, UK BRAG and the BES have been strengthening their working relationship. The theme of the Glasgow meetings was: "Is Biodiversity Research Leading to Action?". A summary of the meeting can be found on the UK BRAG web site.

In September 2008, the link with the BES was further reinforced by the joint organisation of a special session on ecosystem services, held at the BES annual meeting

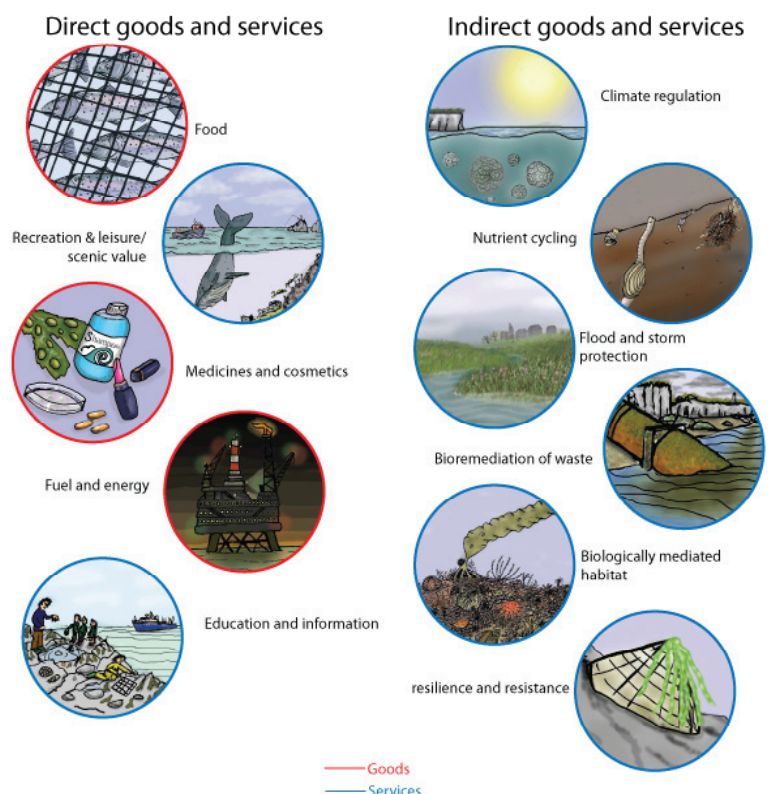
at Imperial College. The very successful, full afternoon, session was attended by over 70 people and included presentations covering policy issues, examples of applied science, and ideas on what research was needed and could be used in policy application. A report of the session and the speaker's presentations can be found on both the UK BRAG and BES websites. An overall conclusion was the need for interdisciplinary working, and that valuing ecosystems must be more than just a bald accounting exercise; policy makers must be given the full scenario.



Following on from this success, another joint session is being held on 9th September 2009, at the University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, focusing on the National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA). See the UK BRAG and BES websites for further details.

Marine biodiversity and the provision of goods and services: identifying the research priorities

In November 2007 a sub-group of the UK BRAG was convened to identify and report back on the research priorities for Marine Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. The group identified that there is limited public/policy awareness of what happens in the marine environment, and of the diversity of species and habitats present in UK waters. Understanding of the impact of human activities upon marine ecosystems is likely to be less than in terrestrial systems. The group proposed research requirements ranging from a global to a local scale, covering both natural science and social science, but point out that in reality such research is cross-cutting and requires a multi-disciplinary approach.



Drawings: Jack Sewell, from Hiscock, K., Marshall, C., Sewell, J. & Hawkins, S.J. (2006). The structure and functioning of marine ecosystems: an environmental protection and management perspective. Report to English Nature from Marine Biological Association. Plymouth: Marine Biological Association. English Nature Contract MAR08-02-015

Four key priority research areas were identified:

- biodiversity - Ecosystem Function;
- critical properties;
- quantification of the goods and services; and
- implications of marine biodiversity change to the delivery of goods and services.

Progress in these four research areas will substantially enhance current understanding of the key processes and properties of marine ecosystems. The full report can be downloaded from the UK BRAG website publications pages, or by following the links from the front page of the website. For further information contact the UK BRAG secretariat at UKBRAG@jncc.gov.uk

A UK BRAG research strategy: genetic conservation

To date, the emphasis of UK conservation policy has been on maintaining the genetic distinctiveness of different species, sub-species or populations due to concerns that we need to maintain existing phenotypes, genetic integrity and local adaptations.

There are numerous knowledge gaps requiring research. In 2007 a specialist sub-group developed a research strategy on behalf of the UK BRAG to address the issue of genetic conservation. The subgroup was chaired by Dr Mike Fay of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, with membership from a variety of organisations representing policy makers, researchers and practitioners. A one-day workshop had been held at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in 2001¹ to discuss genetic conservation in relation to plants, and a more wide-ranging workshop covering animals and plants was organised in 2005². The conclusions from these meetings formed the basis of the discussions of this subgroup, and the conclusions presented in the subsequent report, MF Fay & R Ferris on behalf of UK BRAG Genetic Conservation sub group, (2007), *A UK BRAG research strategy: genetic conservation*, follow on from those formulated at those meetings.

¹ Fay, M.F., Sutcliffe, J., Jones, B. & Taylor, I. (eds) (2004). *Proceedings of a conservation genetics workshop held at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew*. English Nature Research Report 607. ISSN 0967-876X

² Gregory, A., Burke, T., Ferris, R., Robson, J., Smithers, R. & Whitlock, R. (eds) (2006). *The conservation of genetic diversity: science and policy needs in a changing world*. JNCC Report 393. ISSN 0963-8901

Participation and consultation

The UK BRAG now has an increasing profile and its members regularly provide input into a variety of consultations, as well as participating in national and international meetings.

Some recent examples include:

- contributing to the BBSRC consultation, future directions in BBSRC-funded research relating to environmental change;
- participation in BioStrat and EPBRS meetings, including those on taxonomy and systematics, and the workshop on a network of knowledge on biodiversity;
- involvement in developing the themes and protocols of the BiodivERsA project – a Framework 6 project to develop a web portal to European biodiversity research funding opportunities; and
- responding to the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee enquiry on systematics and taxonomy, including providing a witness to the enquiry.

This final point has also resulted in a follow-up report which specifically calls for UK BRAG input, and has also given rise to a written House of Lords Parliamentary Question to which the Chair and Secretariat responded.

For queries on this or any other topic covered by the UK BRAG, please go to the website **www.ukbrag.org.uk** or e-mail the secretariat at **UKBRAG@jncc.gov.uk**