

JOINT

NatureNews

CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

New Chairman of JNCC announced

Wealth of experience brought to Government UK nature conservation advisers

~ 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.

Our scientific staff are involved with marine work at an international level, including projects to promote the conservation of cold-water coral reefs such as the Darwin Mounds. JNCC chairs the Cold Water Corals Study Group of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and has recently been involved in editorial work on the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) cold water corals publication 'Out of sight, no longer out of mind'.

The Geological Conservation Review team have made significant contributions to international meetings in both China and Dorset, making strides to raise global awareness of geoconservation. The Geological Conservation review Series continues to make progress with the publication of a new title, and detailed accounts of Britain's most important Earth science sites can be accessed from a new database within JNCC's website.

These are just some of the areas 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.

Adrian Darby has been appointed as the new Chairman of JNCC, taking up his duties from 1st October. With vast experience at national and international levels, he has a record of achievement on nature conservation issues and rural affairs.

"JNCC is at a very important moment in its history, with a new strategy about to be unveiled, and imminent organisational changes being prepared," he said.

"These activities will lead to a great many opportunities for JNCC to have an influence on nature and wildlife, not only within the UK, but also in Europe and more widely internationally. I see this as a tremendous challenge, and welcome the opportunity to place nature conservation at the heart of everyone's agenda."

Announcing the appointment, Ben Bradshaw, Minister for Nature Conservation, said "Mr Darby's experience in nature conservation will help ensure that JNCC continues to deliver its responsibilities effectively and in constructive partnerships."

This was supported by Professor David Ingram, an independent member of the Joint Committee, who has been Acting Chair of the JNCC since January this year. "I'm delighted to hear about the appointment of Mr. Darby. He will be an excellent Chairman, and the JNCC is in safe hands."



Image © Plantlife

Adrian Darby is a self-employed farmer in Worcestershire, and Vice-President of the RSPB (and a former Member and Chair of its Council), Chairman of Planta Europe and also Chairman of the Advisory Council of Plantlife International (and a former full Chair of the organisation). He was awarded an OBE for services to nature conservation in 1996.

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Committee sees dolphins join *space programme!*

JNCC visit Moray Firth on latest fact-finding mission

Once a year, the Joint Committee combines one of its quarterly business meetings with a field visit, in order to consider an issue of UK conservation importance in detail. The hosts for this year's field meeting were Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), and the issue under consideration was the conservation of dolphins and porpoises in UK waters.

One of the most significant threats facing these animals concerns the numbers which are accidentally killed as a result of getting caught in fishing gear, including in gill nets and mid-water trawls. In March 2004, a new EC Regulation was adopted which will require the use of acoustic deterrents or 'pingers' on gill nets deployed from vessels greater than 12m in length. The effect of this measure is expected to be a substantial reduction in mortality of porpoises and dolphins arising from the use of these nets. Its introduction is welcomed. The Regulation, however, does not resolve the problem that significant numbers of common dolphins are killed accidentally by pelagic trawl fisheries in south-western waters, and this remains a matter of concern. Defra are pressing the European Commission for Community action to address this problem.

During its field visit, the Joint Committee considered, in addition to these fishing issues, the particular conservation requirements of the bottlenose dolphin population resident in the waters of the Moray Firth



Joint Committee members visit the Moray Firth.

and adjacent sea areas. The Moray Firth is one of two UK sites submitted to the European Commission as candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSACs) for bottlenose dolphin under the EC Habitats Directive (the other is Cardigan Bay). The Moray Firth population of about 130 dolphins is the subject of ongoing research into population status and dynamics by Aberdeen University and the Sea Mammal Research Unit. One of the possible impacts on the population is disturbance caused by boats engaged in dolphin-watching activities in the Firth. The Dolphin Space Programme has been introduced to manage and reduce this impact.

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Senses *working overtime*

New JNCC Annual Report takes a close-up look at nature conservation

Recipients of the hard copy version of JNCC's latest *Annual Report* are in for a bombardment of the senses - with a cover that has the feel of feathers and fur, although it is simply a new type of paper stock.

The front cover focuses on a close-up view of the plumage of the barn owl, and the back depicts another close-up, the russet hues of the fur of a red squirrel. Both are species that have been of concern within JNCC's work programmes during the reporting year. Inside, there are once again spectacular images of some of the wildlife and habitats that JNCC works to conserve – continuing a standard that helped last year's JNCC Annual Report to win the coveted 'Public Service Annual Report of the Year' honour at the Charity and Public Service Publishing Awards.

"Wanting to use environment-friendly materials doesn't mean you have to stifle creativity – you can balance the credentials of your finished product so that overall it is seen to be doing the right thing, without losing valuable impact."
Alex Geairns, JNCC Communications Manager

"We see our *Annual Report*

not just as a publication that fulfils our statutory duties to report back to Government," notes

JNCC's Director of Resources and External Affairs,

Marcus Yeo. "Our *Annual Report* also

functions to help our profile amongst the wide range of organisations and individuals that have an interest in UK and international nature conservation – we need the look and feel of this publication to reflect the professional and pioneering approach that we take to our work."



The JNCC Annual Report 2003-2004 is available free to all interested enquirers, by phoning 01733 866839, or emailing communications@jncc.gov.uk

Strategy is straight in to the sea

Review of Marine Nature Conservation reports to Government

The Review of Marine Nature Conservation commenced in 1999 in fulfilment of the UK Government's pledge to accompany the strengthening of protection for terrestrial wildlife sites with an examination of the effectiveness of nature conservation in the marine environment, including intertidal and coastal waters.

The Review was conducted by officials of the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), and subsequently of Defra, and supported by a Working Group drawing upon a wide range of interests. It has been the most fundamental and comprehensive review of marine nature conservation management ever undertaken in the UK. In the last edition of *Nature News*, we highlighted the publication of *Marine Nature*

Conservation and Sustainable Development: The Irish Sea Pilot, which was an important contribution to the Review. The Review was also supported by the work of its subgroups on the provision of environmental information, and on legislative mechanisms, and by papers provided by members of the Working Group and its Secretariat.

After nearly five years of intensive work, the Review report has been published and was launched on 26 July 2004. The *Review of Marine Nature Conservation - Working Group Report to Government* makes 16 key recommendations, and 73 supporting recommendations, which cover a wide range of issues, including: the overall strategy for marine nature conservation; the use of 'Regional Seas' for management purposes; the role of marine landscapes, protected areas and priority features; spatial planning; legislation and enforcement issues; governance arrangements; monitoring; and the provision of information.



Report cover image

© Rohan Holt/Marine Conservation Society

It is expected that the Government will respond to the Review's recommendations by the end of the year.

Review of Marine Nature Conservation - Working Group Report to Government is available from Defra Publications Admail 6000, London SW1A 2XX Email: defra@iforcegroup.com

Non-natives make JNCC restless

A minimum of 2,900 non-native species occur in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, based on the recent results of a JNCC-commissioned review. Non-native species are a major cause of the loss of biodiversity globally. Their impacts are especially severe on island ecosystems and associated species typical of our Overseas Territories, where globally important seabird colonies and threatened endemic species are vulnerable to the impacts of, for instance, introduced rats or invasive plants. The review showed that Bermuda has the unfortunate distinction of topping the non-native species polls with 1,139 species recorded – by contrast, the South Sandwich Islands have none. However, it only takes the presence of a single invasive species to have devastating consequences for some native wildlife.

The review, undertaken by Karen Varnham, is the outcome of information gathered from literature, individual experts and organisations, both in the UK and in the Territories or Dependencies themselves. It was guided by a workshop at JNCC in January 2004 involving the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Department for International Development (DfID) and members of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum. This audit will contribute to measures aimed at eradicating, controlling and, more importantly, preventing the future establishment of, non-native species.

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Rats, whether black or brown (pictured) are found in most Overseas Territories. Despite successful efforts at local control and eradication, they remain a serious and pervasive threat to ground-nesting birds and other native biodiversity. © Paul Hobson/Naturepl

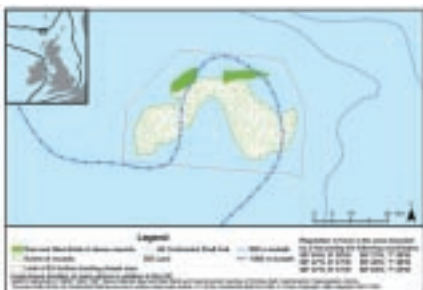
JNCC defends Darwin Mounds!

Cold-water coral reef protected from further damage

As reported in issue 5 of *Nature News* in 2002, JNCC advised Defra that the Darwin Mounds was a possible Special Area of Conservation (pSAC) for its cold-water coral (*Lophelia pertusa*) reefs in UK offshore waters. JNCC also advised Defra that restrictions on trawling, which has been shown to have damaged some of the coral mounds, would be needed within the Darwin Mounds pSAC.

We do not yet have full UK Regulations implementing the Habitats and Birds Directives in UK offshore waters. Defra consulted in late 2003 on draft Regulations, and the final Habitats Regulations are due to be put before Parliament this autumn. Despite the lack of Regulations, Defra took action to prevent further damage by bottom trawlers to the cold water corals at the Darwin Mounds. In response to a request by the UK, the European Commission introduced 'emergency measures' in August 2003, under the recently reformed Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), to ban bottom trawling within the area. The Commission then started negotiations for a permanent measure under the CFP to ban trawling permanently. This regulation was agreed, after detailed negotiations, by the European Council in April 2004.

A permanent ban on bottom trawling within the area, shown on map below, came into force in August 2004. Agreement of this ban, and the method by which it was achieved, sets an important precedent in terms of control of



A permanent ban on trawling within the area shown on this map of the Darwin Mounds came into force in August 2004, when the six month extension to the emergency measures expired.



An example of the coral *Lophelia pertusa* with *Gorgonia fan Paragorgia arborea*, Norway © Rudolf Svensen

damaging fishing activity in areas of nature conservation importance at a European level. The Darwin Mounds is the first such area to have Europe-wide fishing restrictions imposed, but there are likely to be other sites requiring restriction of certain fishing activities, both in UK waters and in other Member States.

JNCC is also involved with marine work at an international level, including work to promote the conservation of cold-water coral reefs such as the Darwin Mounds. This work is achieved partly through actions to conserve *Lophelia pertusa* reef under the Oslo and Paris Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR), through chairing the Cold Water Corals Study Group of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), and through editorial work on a publication just released by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) - *Out of sight, no longer out of mind* (July 2004, available from JNCC, or online at <http://www.unep-wcmc.org/press/cold-water-coral-reefs/>). This report has been produced by various scientific experts in the field of cold-water corals, and is supported by the governments of Ireland, Norway, and the UK (represented by JNCC on behalf of Defra),

WWF and UNEP. This important publication summarises our knowledge of the ecology of cold-water coral reefs, their actual and potential distribution worldwide, their status and the principal threats they face.

Cold-water coral ecosystems are long-lived and fragile, which makes them particularly vulnerable to physical damage. The impacts of human activities are evident in almost every survey reported, regardless of the depth at which the corals occur.

The report provides a set of recommendations concerning the urgent need for: information management and research; monitoring and assessment; the development and implementation of management regulations; and the international co-ordination of activities and awareness.

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UK Indicators signal way ahead

At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 it was agreed to:
'achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on earth'.

At the seventh Convention on Biological Diversity Conference of the Parties (CBD CoP7), a framework of indicators was adopted to measure the achievement of the target. The European Commission Biodiversity Expert Group and a number of international meetings have been considering how these indicators might be implemented at European and Pan-European scales. This recently culminated in the discussions at the Malahide Biodiversity and the EU - Sustaining Life, Sustaining Livelihoods Conference, which were welcomed by the June Environment Council.

The third UK Biodiversity Indicators Forum meeting was held at JNCC Peterborough on 6 July 2004. The meeting, chaired by John Custance, Chief Statistician at Defra, was an opportunity for Government agencies and Non-Governmental Organisations to exchange information and consider a UK response to these initiatives.

The agreement at the CBD CoP7 has led to significant progress, and the processes for development of indicators at global, EU and Pan-European levels have converged. There is now momentum for rapid progress towards the production of global and European indicators within a year to 18 months, leading to publication of a first assessment in 2006.

The meeting reviewed these developments and looked forward to the way the EU indicators would be developed (co-ordination through the European Environment Agency and Biodiversity Expert Group), and how these developments could, or should, fit with global developments under CBD (for instance, via a liaison group and ad-hoc expert technical group in autumn 2004, leading into the 10th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technology and Technological Advice).

Dr James Williams speaking at the recent third UK Biodiversity Indicators Forum meeting at JNCC.



The expectation is that all the indicators will be based on existing data. The intention is not to produce something perfect, but which can communicate at a high political level and substantiate the opinion that biodiversity is being lost. There is flexibility in the framework for States to use similar but not identical information within their indicators.

The UK (through Defra and JNCC) have expressed willingness to be involved in this work – we now need to work out the best ways to engage, including who to nominate to which group.

The meeting recognised the considerable work done in the UK on indicators and monitoring and thought it vital for the UK to continue to influence the international work and agreements on biodiversity indicators based on our own experience. It was recognised, however, that we should do this as a partner rather than trying to impose our own practices.

Further information, including background papers and a summary of discussions, are available on the JNCC website (www.jncc.gov.uk/indicators)

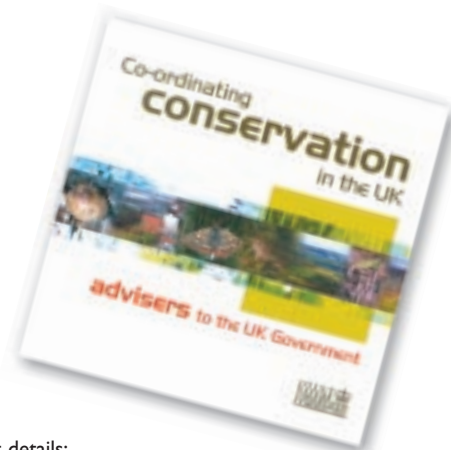
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Pocket guide to UK nature conservation

The UK has six statutory bodies involved in nature and landscape conservation. Five have geographical remits covering England, Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales.

JNCC, the sixth body, co-ordinates nature conservation at a UK level, acting on behalf of the other agencies to advise the UK Government on matters relating to nature conservation nationally and internationally.

The new *Co-ordinating conservation in the UK* leaflet produced by JNCC provides a user-friendly guide for understanding the statutory bodies and their individual roles.



It details:

- Responsibilities at a glance for the UK statutory conservation bodies
- Roles of the organisations
- Full contact details for statutory bodies and governments

For free copies of the leaflet please email: communications@jncc.gov.uk

Geology and Geoparks around the world

Two international meetings in China during June, and one in September in Dorset, made major strides in raising global awareness of geoconservation, with JNCC making significant contributions to all three.

The *First International Conference on Geoparks* was held in Beijing in late June to promote this growing concept of protected areas based on geodiversity values, with JNCC presenting a keynote paper. For aficionados of protected areas, geoparks would fit into the IUCN category III, a protected area managed mainly for conservation of specific natural features.

The World Heritage Committee also met in late June, in Suzhou, China, with JNCC providing support to the UK Government delegation. The meeting included discussion of a JNCC-led review on developing a global geoconservation strategy for the Convention, including the need to link to the geoparks programme.

The Dorset conference, entitled *Earth heritage: World Heritage*, helped to develop strategic links between international geoconservation programmes. The event explored a number of themes: the use of geodiversity audits and the use of action plans to inform conservation strategy and planning; benefits and limitations of



Earth Science and Coastal Adviser Tony Weighell speaking at The First International Conference on Geoparks, in China

protected area programmes; and geodiversity links to biodiversity and cultural heritage.

The Chinese hosts for the summer meetings provided ethnic music and dragon dancing. The English West Country may lack dragons, but the event offered an evening talk from broadcaster Aubrey Manning, trips to the spectacular coast, a resident artist to capture the every mood of delegates, and a genuine school dinner experience at a local school!

GCR delivers Jurassic 30th Volume

Volume 30 of JNCC's Geological Conservation Review Series was published in June 2004. The new book, *British Lower Jurassic Stratigraphy* (by M J Simms, N Chidlaw, N Morton and K N Page), details the character and scientific importance of 45 GCR sites specially selected to represent this geological topic. The sites range from small disused quarries to magnificent coastal cliffs, which collectively represent 22 million years of Earth history, from 200 to 178 million years ago.

The Lower Jurassic outcrop in Britain forms a strip of predominantly marine mudstones and limestones, commonly termed the 'Lias', which extends from the East Devon and west Dorset coast through Somerset, Gloucestershire, the East Midlands and Humberside, to the coast of Cleveland and North Yorkshire. Outcrops in Scotland are found predominantly in the Hebrides. Familiar sites include Robin Hood's Bay and Whitby in North Yorkshire, and part of the Dorset and East Devon World Heritage Coast.

The variety of Lower Jurassic rocks and the wealth of fossils they contain have contributed enormously to our knowledge and understanding of the factors that influenced the Early Jurassic environment, such as sea-level fluctuation, basin subsidence and climate change.



The picture shows *Asteroceras obtusum*, a fossil ammonite from the Lower Jurassic rocks of Charmouth, Dorset.

Characteristic fossils like this provide useful 'markers' in successions of rock layers, and provide valuable clues to the type of environment in which the animals lived.

For further details about the GCR project, visit www.jncc.gov.uk/earthheritage
British Lower Jurassic Stratigraphy is available from NHBS Ltd, price £55
www.nhbs.com

A fossil ammonite from Charmouth, Dorset. © K N Page

Geology goes into

cyberspace

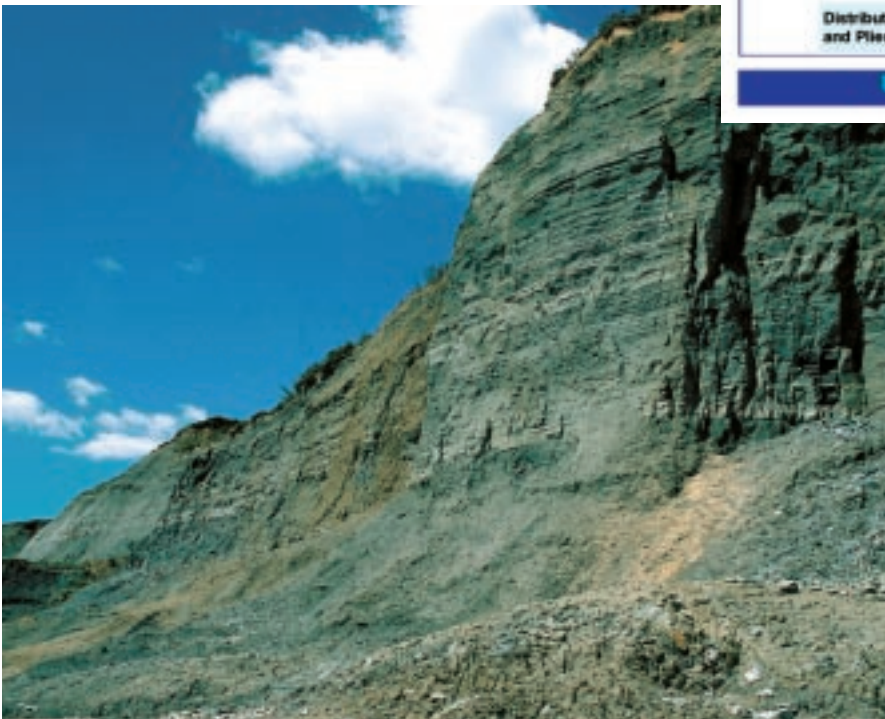
Information about Britain's most important Earth science sites can now be accessed from a database within JNCC's website. The Geological Conservation Review (GCR) database is used to manage basic data for each GCR site, of which there are more than 3,000. The sites were selected for around 100 categories (called GCR 'Blocks') encompassing the range of geological and geomorphological features of Britain. Detailed accounts of the sites listed in the database are being published in the 43 volumes of the Geological Conservation Review Series, although it is anticipated that in the future these accounts will also be available in a digital format.

Users of the database can search for information in various ways, for example by name, geographical location, or geological context (GCR Block). Definitions and details of the GCR Blocks used in the initial GCR site selection process are also available. The database can be found at www.jncc.gov.uk/earthheritage/gcrdb/background.htm

As the publication of the GCR Series nears completion, JNCC is embarking on a review of the GCR site 'register', which may result in proposals for new sites and suggestions for deletions. The database will reflect this review, and will be updated whenever new sites are proposed and accepted, or reviewed and removed.



Distribution map of Hettangian-Pliensbachian GCR sites sourced from the GCR database. These sites are described in volume 30 of the GCR Series.



Conspicuously striped units of the Lias Group seen here at Charmouth are characteristic of the Lias Group on the Dorset Coast. Charmouth forms part of the Pinhay Bay to Fault Corner GCR site, one of the GCR sites selected for the Hettangian, Sinemurian and Pliensbachian GCR Block. © M J Simms

New pollution information system is a

breath of fresh air



Fiddlers Ferry Power Station © Peter Wakely/English Nature

*JNCC and partners
launched a web-based
Air Pollution Information
System (APIS) in June.
It provides freely-available
information on air pollution
and its effects on ecosystems.*

For hundreds of years some of our activities have been causing environmental damage by polluting the air. In the past much of this damage was caused by acid deposition ('acid rain') but the past few decades have seen dramatic reductions in the emissions of the major pollutants sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides. Whilst acidification of our freshwaters and terrestrial ecosystems remains of concern and recovery may take decades, perhaps the greatest current threats come from nitrogen deposition and increased ozone concentrations.

APIS was developed in partnership by the UK nature conservation agencies and environment agencies together with the Scotland and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental Research (SNIFFER) and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH). It is an excellent example of collaboration between different Government agencies and the research community.

APIS has been developed primarily as a support tool for staff in the UK conservation and environment agencies for assessing the potential effects of air pollutants on habitats and species. As such, it aims to enable a consistent approach to air pollution assessment across the UK and will assist the agencies fulfil their obligations under the Habitats Regulations and Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations.

Other potential users include industry, local authorities, Non-Governmental Organisations and universities or anyone interested in finding out more about air pollution effects on wildlife.



Visit the website at www.apis.ac.uk to find information on:

- Habitat and species responses to different air pollutants;
- Legislation and international commitments;
- Critical loads and levels;
- Deposition and concentration data;
- Simple site based screening assessment;
- Bio-monitoring methods.

✉ For more information on APIS, contact:
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Partnership renewed

The Partnership between JNCC and the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) has been renewed following its continued success in assessing the health of bird populations. At a short ceremony on 7 April 2004 during the *Waterbirds Around the World* conference in Edinburgh, the Partners signed up to the next six years of joint work under a new Memorandum of Agreement.

This long-standing Partnership was originally established between the BTO and the Nature Conservancy, the first Government conservation body in Britain. Throughout its history, the Partners have depended upon the skills and enthusiasm of a huge number of volunteers who go out in all weathers every month of the year to count birds throughout the UK. The renewal of the JNCC-BTO Partnership Agreement not only recognises the excellent work of the BTO, but also is a tribute to the vital work of so many enthusiastic volunteers.

The results are long term counts of bird numbers that are the envy of the rest of the world. These are used to find out the effects of different factors upon the abundance of common birds. Declines in many farmland birds are now well known, resulting in a determination by many organisations to act to reverse these losses. The effects of climate change upon birds are being discovered, showing in a new way the value of long term studies. Increasingly, the findings from the BTO-JNCC work are being made available via the internet to reach a wider audience in the UK and elsewhere.



JNCC Managing Director Deryck Steer and the Director of the BTO, Professor Jeremy Greenwood, formally sign the new Memorandum of Agreement
© Dougie Barnett/JNCC.

Brussels at the centre of Green Week celebrations

In June, a number of JNCC staff attended the Green Week celebrations in Brussels. Green Week is organised by the European Commission annually and attracts over 4,000 participants. This year the theme was based around sustainable development and “changing behaviour”. It consisted of four days of presentations, over 60 exhibitors, and other events including the European Environmental Awards, a virtual stock-market, and the launching of an “environmental toolkit” (see http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/toolkits/index_en.htm). While many of the presentations focused on specific policy areas (for instance, impact assessment, the Birds Directive, fisheries) the week also allowed JNCC staff to appreciate the wider European environmental policy context, with sessions dedicated to sustainable development, environmental decision making and information access. Most of the presentations given are now available on the Green Week website (see http://europa.eu.int/comm/environment/greenweek/conference_14_en.htm).

While in Brussels, several staff took the opportunity to meet with Commission officials to discuss specific environmental policy issues, including integration of biodiversity into overseas development aid and the review of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy. These meetings were facilitated by Hugh Laxton, Head of the UK Nature and Landscape Office in Brussels.



The virtual stock-market, Green Week, Brussels

JNCC's adventures *in Bulgaria*



Kreshna Gorge, Bulgaria. © Wyn Jones/JNCC

Bulgaria is planning to join the European Union in 2007, but must have all the necessary legislation and administrative frameworks in place beforehand. This is a considerable challenge but support is provided by the European Commission and existing Member States.

In order to assess progress, the Commission undertake peer reviews on the implementation of European law. The review teams are led by Commission officials and are assisted by specialists from Member States.

Wyn Jones, Head of Habitats Advice at JNCC, recently participated in the environmental peer review of Bulgaria, assessing the wildlife provisions. This was Wyn's third peer review to an accession country. "I am amazed as to how quickly countries are able to establish the necessary laws and infrastructure to implement European wildlife laws. Bulgaria is no exception", he said.

"In addition it is also required to submit a national list of Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation by 2007, and is well on the way to achieving this target".

One of the common problems encountered is lack of staff resources and having too few trained personnel to administer the wildlife Directives. Bulgaria is rich in wildlife, including the Danube in the north, the Black Sea to the east, and the mountains of the central Balkan and Rila national parks. Wyn concluded: "With such variety and richness of wildlife I can recommend visiting Bulgaria".

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Common Standards Monitoring continues to evolve

In February a seminar was held to introduce the guidance on setting and assessing conservation objectives for designated nature conservation sites. The guidance was produced by JNCC and country agencies to assist staff in undertaking site monitoring and assessment.

Guidance is available for a range of species, habitats and Earth science features which occur on UK protected sites.

Further guidance continues to be produced, and is now available on

JNCC's website at www.jncc.gov.uk/csm

The guidance should be of value for others monitoring important wildlife sites, including non-statutory nature reserves. JNCC would be interested to receive progress reports and reviews of its use.

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Biodiversity **uncovered**

JNCC's David Ingram looks to the future benefits of improved access to biodiversity information

www.searchNBN.net is an internet gateway through which you can find and use UK species and habitat distribution data, owned and managed by participants in the National Biodiversity Network (NBN). It also links to additional information about species and habitats published on other websites. The number of participant organisations, and the content available, is growing rapidly.

Information about wildlife at around a million locations throughout the UK can now be retrieved within seconds. This should help us all to take account of biodiversity in the way we use and manage our natural resources, and shape policies for the future.

On 8 June 2004 the NBN Trust held a celebratory event to introduce the new NBN Gateway. In his keynote address, Ben Bradshaw MP, Minister for nature conservation and fisheries, said: "Government recognises that, if we want to ensure the quality of life for this generation and generations to come, we need to protect our wildlife and habitats. Government is showing its commitment through support for the implementation of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and the creation and funding of agri-environment schemes.

"This new information 'Gateway' created by the NBN Trust is a very important part of this process. It will help to ensure easy access to the best information about our wild plants and animals, so that all our actions can be more effective. I congratulate the NBN Trust on its work, which will benefit everyone."

Already available are 15 million observations of flowering plants, butterflies, birds, dragonflies, mosses, and many other species,



Small red-eyed damselfly *Erythromma viridulum*. Steve Cham/British Dragonfly Society

the result of survey work by thousands of expert volunteer naturalists, and survey teams from public bodies and non-government organisations. JNCC, in partnership with the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH), undertook the complex technical development to create the Gateway. Lawrence Way, JNCC Information Manager, noted: "This is more than just another website. Many technical innovations have made the most of online database and Geographical Information Systems technology, and provide a modern solution that delivers benefits of access to data across the public, voluntary and private sectors."

Defra support has been instrumental in the success of the Gateway, the NBN being a response to the challenge of improved access to data set out in the Biodiversity Action Plan for the UK.

Speaking at the launch Professor David Ingram, then Acting JNCC Chairman, said: "A key feature of the NBN Gateway is that it can be used locally, nationally and internationally in the sharing of public and



The British Dragonfly Society were early pioneers of making their data accessible through the NBN Gateway.

confidential data about biodiversity among a range of agencies and users. This attribute not only fits perfectly with the Government's desire to promote joined-up thinking about the environment, but is also in accord with the public sector agenda of freedom of information."

JNCC's own data is available through the mechanism, including recent seabird surveys. We are also using it to support our own work: plant data now available through the Gateway is helping to inform options for meeting the UK's Ramsar Convention obligations.

Brussels contact seeks UK-wide views

The Spring saw the appointment of Hugh Laxton as Head of the UK Nature and Landscape Office in Brussels, replacing David Morgan. The office supports a partnership of UK statutory nature and countryside agencies – JNCC, English Nature, the Countryside Council for Wales and Scottish Natural Heritage. It ensures the interests of the UK agencies are represented as appropriate among the European institutions, provides timely intelligence of relevant EU policy developments, and facilitates visits by agency staff to Brussels.

Prior to his appointment, Hugh worked for the European Commission in the Directorate-General Agriculture as the UK co-ordinator and desk officer for Latvia, in the unit responsible for rural development programmes in Finland, Spain, Sweden, UK and the Baltic states.

“For me, it was a fantastic coincidence that JNCC and the agencies were looking for a new Head of the UK Nature and Landscape Office, just as my contract with the European Commission was coming to an end,” said Hugh. “After 12 years living and working in Brussels, I was keen to continue working here and to maintain and develop my links with the Commission, the Parliament and other Brussels networks, as well as regaining my links to the UK. This post fulfils all those wishes and more.”

“My immediate and most striking impression of JNCC was the open friendliness of everyone and a high level of support, which is particularly important when working remotely from headquarters. The scale of the organisation seems to engender a sense of loyalty that is less evident in larger administrations.”

Although JNCC is Hugh’s base in terms of administration and personnel issues, his role also relates to the other agencies in the partnership – visiting CCW, SNH and English Nature will be among his priorities later in the year.

New Head of the UK Nature and Landscape Office to engage with country agencies



Head of the UK Nature and Landscape Office, in Brussels, Hugh Laxton.

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