

Submitting records to the BRMC

This document has been written in order to smooth the transfer of biological records to the BRMC, by outlining the required content of records and detailing the preferred formats for their transfer.

1. Requirements for a species record

The BRMC recognizes and encourages the high recording standards outlined in the Bedfordshire Natural History Society's (BNHS) recording guidelines.

Of these, the following comprise the *minimum requirement* for a BRMC species record:

- **Species.** Can be the genus, if species cannot be determined.
- **Date.** The more precise, the better, preferably to a day. To a month, or year, or a range of dates are also acceptable, but are less useful.
- **Grid reference.** The more precise, the better. Four figure grid references are the minimum desired accuracy. (Tetrads are discouraged)¹.
- **Location.** Each record should be assigned to a BRMC-recognized site or a description of the location must be provided. (Ideally both).
- **Observer name(s).** The person(s) who saw it. If someone else subsequently determined the record, then their name should also be provided in a separate **Determiner** field of the record.
- **Confidentiality.** All records that are confidential should be clearly marked.
- **Nature of record.** Any extra information necessary to make the record unambiguous and useful. (See below)

A County Recorder or other reliable source must also have verified the record. (Any casual records received by the BRMC will be passed to a County Recorder for verification, before being accepted by the BRMC).

Nature of record

The Nature of record will vary with recording group. For example, simply stating that the species was *Meles meles* (Badger) is incomplete, as the observation could have been of a sett (either active or inactive), an adult or juvenile, a family group, a latrine, fur, tracks or a road kill. With other recording groups, abundance, mating or breeding activity and stage of the life cycle will be important, as may be the method of observation, such as trapping. The weather may also be of significance to report, if this affects the species.

Suggested headings, if breaking down the nature of record into separate fields, are:

- **Sex/stage.** e.g. Male, female, pair, egg, larvae, juvenile, pupa, exuviae, adult, seed, etc.
- **Abundance.** An integer (whole number) quantity of whatever was seen.
- **Description/Comments.** A general description of what was seen, such as an adult swimming, or juvenile feeding, eggs in a nest, flowering spikes, tracks, spraints, sett, etc. Any other pertinent information can be included here, such as the weather.
- **Observation method.** "Field observation" is the most usual (and will be assumed otherwise) but this could be trapped, netted, beaten, etc.

Only those fields applicable to a particular record need be filled-in, else leave blank.

¹ As recording to 1km resolution is fairly easy, recording to tetrad resolution is discouraged. 1km records can be displayed and reported as tetrads later, but the reverse isn't possible. With a good map 100m resolution is often possible, and GPS can help achieve even better where practical.



2. What data formats can the BRMC accept?

The BRMC will try to accept data from all recording packages, but at the time of writing it can most readily accept the following data formats:

- **Spreadsheet (e.g. Excel) file, comma-separated variable file or tab-separated variable file.**
- **Recorder 3 or Recorder 2002 export**
- **MapMate export**

Please contact the BRMC if you wish to transfer using a format that isn't listed. (Paper records may be supplied if resources are available to enter onto computer).

Exports from standard recording packages should normally contain all the required information in a format that can be successfully imported into the BRMC's database, so no extra discussion on these is necessary in this document.

3. Spreadsheets, comma-separated files and tab-separated files

Spreadsheets, comma-separated files and tab-separated files are very popular formats for data entry/transfer and the BRMC welcomes data in these formats. This section provides guidance on how these files can be formatted to make the process of transferring records smoother.

When creating a file, each separate record should

- be on a different row,
- be contained in a single row,
- use fields (columns) consistently, (i.e. the same type of data should always be in the same field position (column number) throughout the file,
- empty fields should still be present, delimited by a comma or tab as normal.

The first row of the file should contain column headings, saying what is in which field (column) of the file. The exact wording of the headings is unimportant as long as their meaning is clear.

The file should contain the following fields (columns), but their order is unimportant.

Species name

This should be the scientific name rather than the common/English name. e.g. *Arvicola terrestris* rather than Water Vole. This will prevent the record from potentially being assigned to the wrong scientific name, as the same common name can be used for more than one species or sub-species.

If a file or worksheet contains records for only one species, this field can be omitted, providing that the species name is conveyed in some other manner, such as in the file name or worksheet name.

Date

Most numerical formats of date can be processed fairly easily. Ranges are also supported if separated by a "-". Try to avoid non-numeric forms of date, such as "July", or "summer" as these are trickier to process.

By preference use dd/mm/yyyy for day-specific dates, mm/yyyy for month-specific dates and yyyy for year-specific dates. (Single-digit day or month is also fine). 4-digit years are preferred, to avoid potential confusion over the century.



Grid reference

Try to provide Ordnance Survey grid references in the form TL12, TL1234, TL123456 or TL12345678. (The inclusion of spaces, or other characters, e.g. TL 123 456, TL123/456 and TL123.456 make records slightly harder to process).

Tetrads are also supported for historic records, e.g. TL12A, but are discouraged for new records, as only a 2km precision in locating a record is less useful.

Location

If the record is assigned to a BRMC-recognized site, then this field's value should be identical to its preferred name, to allow automated linking of the record to the site in the database. Otherwise, the field should be used to clearly describe the observation's location. Separate fields may be used, such as **Site** and **Location description**, to provide both forms of information. This would be ideal.

Observer name

One initial plus the surname is the minimum requirement. Include first name and/or as many initials as possible to uniquely identify the individual. Whilst any format can be processed, the following are preferred:

J A Smith J.A.Smith John A Smith

Other formats, such as surname first, have proven problematical with some software packages in the past. Similarly "J. A. Smith" has given problems due to the spaces in addition to the dots.

Try to use an extra field (column) for each additional observer, rather than providing a list of observers in a single field (column). It is much easier to process that way.

If a **Determiner** field is provided, the same preferences apply as for the observer.

Confidential

This field (column) is only required when one or more of the records is confidential and not to be released to anyone by the BRMC. Mark such records with a "yes" in this field (column). Details of why the record is confidential can also be included.

Nature of record

If provided as a single field (rather than as the separate fields listed below) then this should contain a textual description of the information.

Sex/Stage

If supplied, this should ideally be a standard term, e.g. male, female, pair, egg, larvae, juvenile, pupa, adult, seed, etc.

Abundance

If supplied, this should ideally be an integer (whole number) but vague quantities can be supplied, such as ranges using a "-", or approx. Present, but uncounted can also be indicated. Please provide a key if the abundance isn't in the form of a number.

Description/Comment

If supplied, then this is used to describe anything about the observation not covered by the other fields.

Observation method

If supplied, then this is used to say how the observations were made. Try to use standard terms where possible, such as Longworth trapped, beaten or netted.



Example

The following is an example of a record that is easy to process:

Species	Date	Gridref	Site name	Stage	Observer	Determiner	Abundance	Comment
Inachis io	01/07/2003	TL067526	Putnoe Wood CWS	Larvae	J.Smith	A.N.Other	10	Some parasitized

4. BRMC-recognized Sites

Recorders of the BNHS, in conjunction with other naturalists and the BRMC have defined a set of sites covering Bedfordshire and Luton for biological recording purposes. Each site is considered as having known, or potential, biological significance, and may represent statutory sites (e.g. SSSIs), non-statutory sites (e.g. County Wildlife Sites) and other areas known to be of significance by naturalists.

The greatest value in assigning records to a common set of sites is that species lists can easily be obtained for particular sites and types of habitat. These:

- are essential when considering sites for statutory and non-statutory protection;
- are valuable when evaluating land-use change, such as building development, to help know what species may be affected and thus allow for effective opposition or mitigation;
- assist landowners and managers when considering how a site should be managed;
- allow comparison of one site with another, for example woodlands, to know which sites are in a poor condition relative to others, or under-recorded perhaps.

For some wildlife groups it is impractical to locate every observation with a unique grid reference, so they tend to be lumped-together to be from a particular site. If the site is pre-defined and used by all observers, then all records will be known to be from within the boundary of that site. By using a common set of sites for recording all wildlife groups, all records will have consistent boundaries. This greatly assists the obtaining of site species information that would otherwise have to cope with overlapping sites of different shapes and sizes used by different recording schemes.

Some observers consistently have difficulty in getting grid references correct, plus human error allows anyone to make a mistake. By asking observers and County Recorders to assign observations to sites, there is a safety check built in to alert to erroneous grid references that don't match the site name.

Apart from anything else, referring to a site by a single well-known name is far easier than trying to refer to an odd shaped area by a list of grid references!

For all of the above reasons the BRMC therefore requests records to be assigned to the BRMC-recognized list of sites. Site details will be obtainable from the BRMC in due course.

5. BRMC Contact Details

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