Biodiversity recording on reserves guidelines

Why we need records and how you can contribute

The Scottish Wildlife Trust uses species and habitats data to help make management decisions for a reserve, and target any rare, protected or invasive species. The Trust commissions surveys and monitoring regimes on a regular basis, but also collects single species observations and site visit lists. In order to allow much easier access to this valuable biodiversity data and make better use of it, species records are entered into a database, Recorder 6 (the national standard recording software).

The Trust often relies on skilled volunteers to do annual monitoring work or to produce new species lists for a site. We value donated species or habitats records for our wildlife reserves as they contribute to the knowledge of a site and help build a picture of how they are changing through time. You can help by noting down any sightings of unusual, protected, or local interest species; or by listing all the species you see when visiting a reserve. Even records of common species can be useful. If you would like to get more involved, you can be put in contact with your local Reserve Manager about regular habitat or species monitoring.

Please use the Excel format Trust recording template (click here to download) to send in your sightings. Instructions on its use can be found below. It has been designed to enable your records to be quickly and easily incorporated into our system. When information is submitted in other formats, such as within paragraphs of text in Microsoft Word, the relevant data must be extracted manually, which can be very time consuming and often the detail gets lost.

Quality of recording

Each habitat or species record is made up of different pieces of information. Some are essential for a record to be useful and meaningful, such as the name of the recorder (you), a location of the sighting, the date of sighting and a species. You can also include much more information, such as behaviour or abundance.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust welcomes records from anyone competent in the identification of the species they are recording. Records need to be of sound quality as they will be used for a range of purposes. If you are new to wildlife recording, or are recording outwith Scottish Wildlife Trust reserves, you may wish to try iSpot, which lets you engage with a wide community of recorders across the UK. As well as sharing your wildlife photos, you can get help in identifying what you've seen and join discussions. If you are unsure of specific taxa, it is best to leave them to the experts.

To reduce the possibility of species being misidentified, the Trust will follow National Biodiversity Network (NBN) guidelines on verification. The improvement of data quality is ongoing, and uses tools such as the NBN Record Cleaner plus the assistance of National Schemes and Societies and other experts.

How to use the spreadsheet and sending in your records

The Trust's recording template is available to download on our website (http://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/our-work/our-evidence-base/get-recording/). To save a copy to your computer, go to this webpage and click 'download the Trust's recording template', selecting 'Open'. In the opened file, go to File > Save As, choose an appropriate filename and location for your file and click 'Save'. Alternatively,

The recording template is designed to be flexible in the amount of detail recorded. Columns shaded in blue are compulsory and must be filled in to produce a useful record; others are optional. Each record (one species at one location at one point of time) should be in a different row, and the information making up the record entered into the correct column. Text below each column heading gives information on what should be included. Example records are also provided (shaded in grey) at the top of the spreadsheet for further assistance.

Although including a grid reference is optional, it is recommended as it enables future monitoring effort; this is limited when using a reserve name alone. National Grid References (NGRs) consist of two capital letters followed

by an even number of digits, with no spaces in-between. Instructions on recording grid references are available on Ordnance Survey (OS) maps and the OS website. 'Grab a Grid Reference' is also a very useful tool. The highest level of grid reference you are confident in should be included for each record - at least 6 figures (e.g. XX123456) are preferred.

Each time you add records to your spreadsheet, remember to save your updated file (go to File > Save, or use the 🖫 icon). When your spreadsheet is complete (e.g. when it contains all of your sightings for the year or the recording season), please share it with us. Send your latest spreadsheet to us electronically, by email (in a new email, click the 📎 button to attach the file) or on a CD or memory stick. It is important to do this rather than printing and posting it, as typing this data into the database would then be very time-consuming. The data should be sent to the Reserve Manager in charge of the reserve(s) in the first instance. If you do not have a Reserve Manager contact, please send it to the Knowledge and Evidence Officer, Richard Siller (rsiller@scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk).

What we will do with the data and copyright issues

The Scottish Wildlife Trust believes in open access to data unless there is a good reason to restrict it. To this end, all species and habitat records donated to us will be posted on the NBN Atlas (http://scotland.nbnatlas.org/) which is an internet based database for biodiversity data. The public will be given full access to all records, except for "sensitive" species as listed by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), which are at risk from public disturbance, such as raptors, badgers and otters. Data for sensitive species will only be passed on to approved persons. For more detailed information, please refer to the Biodiversity Data Access Policy on our website.

Data will also be made available to Local Records Centres, where they exist, for full collation into their systems. To reduce the possibility of duplicate records, the Trust would prefer to act as the first point of contact for data collected on our reserves, as this allows us to check the records and also keeps us informed of any change or anything unusual that we may need to respond to.

The way species sightings recorded on Scottish Wildlife Trust reserves are dealt with is illustrated below
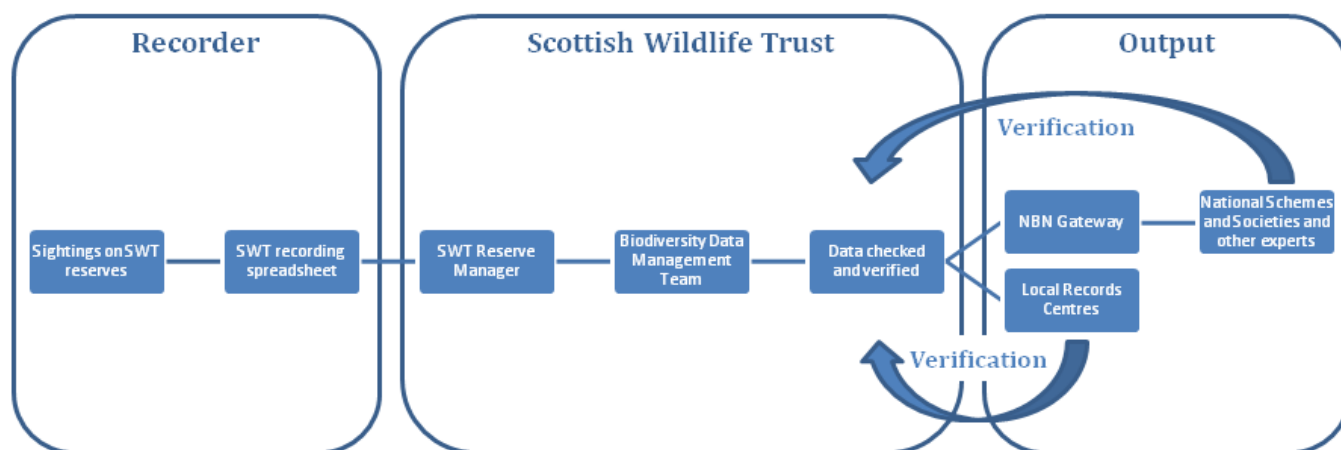
All data, whomever it is passed on to, remains the property of the original recorder under copyright. By passing records to the Trust you are agreeing to us collating and disseminating them as set out above. The Trust cannot guarantee to take records provided to us with additional conditions. Your contact details will not be passed on to a third party and will only be used for verification purposes, while your name will form part of the record.

Wherever possible, the Scottish Wildlife Trust will use records donated to us, and incorporate them into the systems outlined above within a reasonable timescale. However the Trust cannot guarantee to do so due to quality issues, time involved inputting records and staff capacity.