



NBIS Annual Report 2020/21



Introduction and NBIS objectives

The Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service (NBIS) is a Local Environmental Records Centre (LERC) covering the county of Norfolk. NBIS is a member of the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC) and operates within the framework of the National Biodiversity Network.

Thanks to its position and diverse range of habitats, over 16,200 different species have been recorded in Norfolk since 1600. The North Norfolk coast is a mecca for bird watchers, the Broads are a stronghold to the rare Norfolk Hawker dragonfly and Swallowtail butterfly, whilst the Brecks host several plant and invertebrate species unique to the area.

2857 of these species are classified as 'Species of Conservation Concern'. This means they are rare, threatened or protected by law. NBIS also holds 34686 records of 122 invasive non-native species.

Based at County Hall, Norwich the service sits within the Environment Team of Norfolk County Council, part of the Communities and Environmental Services Department.

NBIS aims to be a single, central point for obtaining high quality environmental information for Norfolk, providing quick and easy access to information on species, geodiversity, habitats and protected sites.

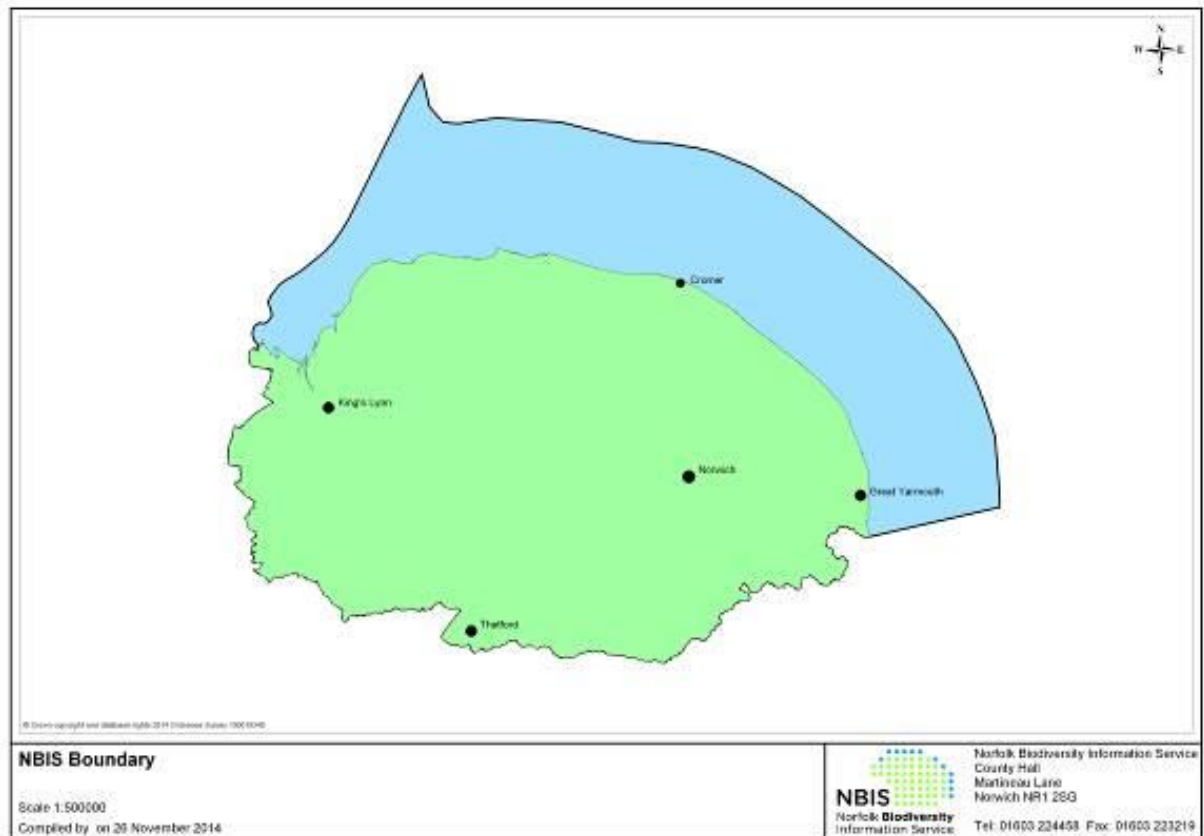
To fulfil this aim NBIS operates under the principles set out in its [Operational Framework](#).

NBIS is guided and supported by a Steering Group that usually meets twice each year and is made up of representatives of its users. These include staff from County and District Councils, IDBs, Ecological Consultants, Environment Agency, Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society, Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Anglian Water and Norfolk FWAG. We are very grateful for the time and commitment that our steering group members give in attending meetings and providing guidance. The steering group now works under a [Terms of Reference](#). These terms of reference are reviewed every 2 years and were reviewed and agreed in the January 2020 meeting.

Much of the species data held by NBIS and made available for planning and conservation decision making is provided by the voluntary network of County Recorders. These people are members of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists Society and are experts in their taxonomic fields.

They provide or check all the records going on to the NBIS database to ensure high quality data, spending hours of their own time verifying the records for us each year. We would like to express our thanks to these recorders and all the volunteers who record and gather species records over the year. Without the dedication and support of the recorders, County Recorders and volunteers we would struggle to be able to function as an effective Local Environmental Record Centre.

Map showing the boundary of the NBIS area, including the marine component:



Staff:

- Martin Horlock – Environment Manager (Information & Partnerships) – Line manages NBIS staff.
- Sam Neal – Biodiversity Officer (Information) (1fte) – Manages the day-to-day running of NBIS and GIS and project work.
- Lizzy Oddy - Assistant Biodiversity Officer (Information) (0.61fte) - Data enquiries, data management and project work
- Nicola Dixon – Assistant Biodiversity Officer (Information) (1fte) – NBIS database cleaning and move to new system, data management and project work.
- Liam Dixon - Communities and Nature Assistant (1fte) – Public engagement and events, volunteer management, NBP assistance.

Funding and Data Partners

Organisation	Type of Agreement
Norfolk County Council	Hosting Agreement
South Norfolk Council	Service Level Agreement
Great Yarmouth Borough Council	Service Level Agreement
Breckland Council	Service Level Agreement
Environment Agency	Service Level Agreement
Anglian Water	Service Level Agreement
British Trust for Ornithology	Data Agreement
Norfolk Wildlife Trust	Data Exchange Agreement
People's Trust for Endangered Species	Data Exchange Agreement

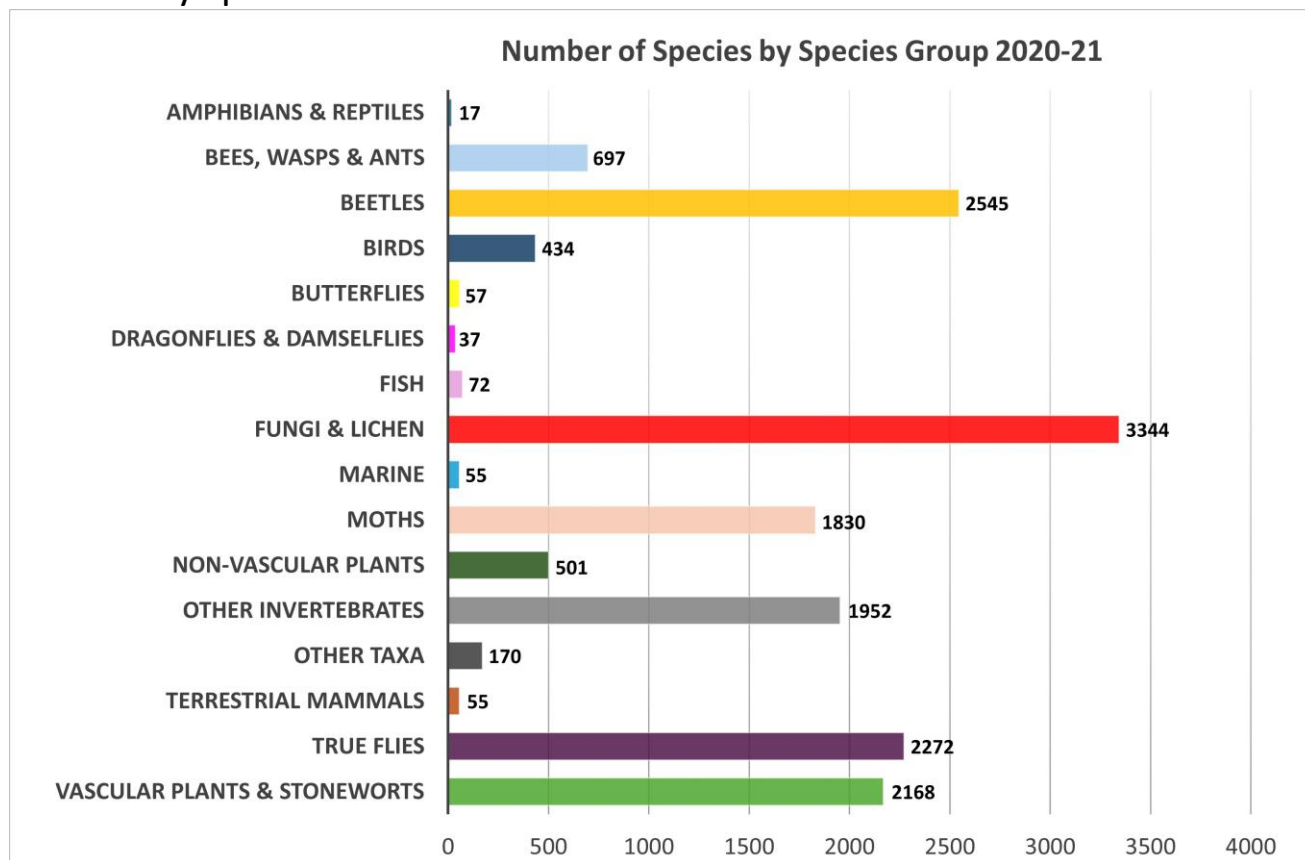
13 ecological consultancies had an SLA or bulk-buy agreement for data searches.

NBIS also has an important set of non-funding partners who provide essential support and encouragement. These include:

Association of Local Environmental Records Centres
East of England Regional Local Records Centre Forum
Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society.

Data Holdings

How many species have been recorded in Norfolk?



Species diversity in Norfolk, by taxonomic group (based on data held by NBIS, March 2021)

The NBIS database currently contains **3,363,446 species records** (as of 31st March 2021, including a number from our neighbouring counties of Suffolk and Cambridgeshire, collated as part of cross-county biodiversity audits).

Data Enquiries

Responding to data enquiries is a core function for NBIS and is a daily task. Requests come in from ecological consultants, conservation bodies, local authorities, students and interested members of the public wanting to know about protected species and sites in a particular area. NBIS aims to respond to all enquiries within 5 working days and to enquiries from our funding partners within 3 working days.

NBIS continues to operate the Regional Standard Enquiry Service. This service was developed with ecological consultants to ensure that anyone requesting a data search for planning purposes from the region's LERCs receives a standard set of protected species and site data within 10 days.

Number of each enquiry type processed each year:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Commercial Searches	444	541	471	539
Non-commercial Searches	49	69	44	64
Partner Searches (Including Districts)	9	19	18	5
TOTAL	502	629	533	608

NBIS Recorders Fund

NBIS operates a fund to support wildlife recording in Norfolk. This fund consists of the monies raised from commercial enquiries during the previous year and is designed to reinvest in our local recording network to provide the records we need to process these enquiries. The fund runs during the financial year with any remaining monies rolling over to the next.

In 2020-21, the projects funded were:

- Research to determine how bat communities respond to pond restoration and management.
- Continuation of specimen checking a museum collection of beetles to ensure accurate identification.
- Converting SM2+ bat detectors to be used for long term passive acoustic monitoring projects with limited manual intervention.

Regional and National Collaboration

Staff attended the first online ALERC Conference in October 2020 and an online NBN Conference in November 2020.

NBIS has continued to maintain a presence on the CWS steering group, Geodiversity Partnership group, Norfolk Ponds Project, Brecks Biodiversity Delivery Group and the Communities and Nature Working Group.

The Biodiversity Officer (Information) represented NBIS on the council of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society, and as a member of their Research Committee. Also, the officer represented NBIS on the advisory board for Orchards East.

NBIS has continued membership of the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC) and following the launch of the accreditation process in July 2012 NBIS began work to meet the necessary criteria in preparation for applying for accreditation in 2015. NBIS was assessed in August 2015 and following a successful result officially became an accredited LERC. This means that NBIS demonstrated that we were meeting or exceeding a set of criteria drawn up by ALERC to ensure LERC's are providing a good service to their users and providers. Accreditation is valid for 5 years. NBIS was re-assessed and achieved reaccreditation in 2020.

Local Sites Monitoring

On behalf of Norfolk County Council, NBIS monitors Single Data List 160-01 (previously National Indicator 197) – percentage of Local Sites (Wildlife and Geodiversity) in Positive Conservation Management (PCM). NBIS undertakes the analysis of this indicator (with assistance from Norfolk Wildlife Trust) and reports the findings directly to Defra, as required under the SDL.

SDL 160 data was not requested by Defra for 2020-21.

County Wildlife Sites (CWS)

NBIS works with staff at Norfolk Wildlife Trust (NWT) and through the Local Sites Partnership to coordinate, create and provide to users the CWS annual update. Data and information for the 2020 update is available and downloadable to partners.

Event Attendance

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there were no wildlife events to attend in 2020-21.

Annual Recorders Event

Due to the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic, there was no Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society and NBIS Recorders Event in 2020-2021.

Communications

NBIS continues to have a presence on Facebook and Twitter.

NBIS produces, jointly with Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership and Norfolk Non-native Species Initiative, a monthly e-bulletin. This is distributed via email to a wide contacts list.

Projects

Adjusting to a new way of working

When the country went into lockdown in March 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, a new way of working had to be established quickly. NBIS staff were already able to work remotely to a degree, but full-time working from home required systems such as the NBIS enquiries tool to be adjusted so it functioned efficiently. Microsoft Teams became the only way to run meetings, flexible working was utilised to deal with changes in childcare availability and conferences were run online. Thanks to the hard work and resilience of NBIS staff, services were able to continue almost seamlessly, customer service was maintained, and project work could continue.

NBIS Re-accredited

NBIS first achieved ALERC accreditation in 2015, submitting documentation and evidence to show that we were providing a good service to our users and providers. Accreditation lasts for five years, so in 2020 we began working on collating further documentation and evidence to demonstrate that we deserved a further five years as a re-accredited LERC. As well as providing any documents that had been updated since the last submission, we also had to show evidence that we were undertaking continuous improvement of our processes. Documents were submitted to ALERC in summer 2020 and we later received the good news that we had been re-accredited for a further five years.

ORCA Database development, data cleaning and consultation

Despite the global pandemic, work has continued apace in developing our new ORCA database and accompanying enquiries system. Customers and stakeholders were consulted on the proposed new service, helping to shape what we will offer. New processes and procedures were drawn up and put into place. A large-scale data cleaning operation was undertaken to ensure the data sent out in enquiries was GDPR compliant. The previous enquiry system had allowed for checking and editing data in spreadsheets before it was sent to customers, which was a time-consuming process. The new system will not have this stage, therefore being much quicker and more efficient, but meaning we need to be confident that there are no personal details within any of the records.

Finance

The table below shows the budget for 2020-21 and the previous two years. It is essential that NBIS continues to secure external project funding to ensure the centre can continue to run as effectively when income is shorter. The below table does not include the contributing costs of Norfolk County Council to the hosting of NBIS.

Expenditure (in £)	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Staff salaries/training/travel/subsistence/conferences	-62446.20	-12846.39	-222737.76
IT hardware/software & general equipment purchase	-765.84	-165.32	-4345.88
Subscriptions (e.g. ALERC)	-750.00	-800.00	-800.00
Contractor costs	-2248.17	-1680.00	-2355.00
Venue hire/food costs etc	-100.00	-200.00	
Printing/marketing/design	0.00	-285.95	
other/misc	-6.00	-91.92	
Publications/NBIS recorders fund/recorder support	-2594.00		-1649.60
Budget adjustments/financials	0.00		
Match Funding/project contributions/P&C contributions	-999.99	-12107.61	-27019.50
Total expenditure	-69910.20	-28177.19	-258907.74
Income (in £)	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Data Searches	44285.00	40530.00	50900.00
Project work/contracted works/other charges	5000.00	1800.00	10113.84
Service Level Agreements with Local Authorities/IDBs	10050.00	2550.00	
Service Level Agreements with utilities	2825.00	3000.00	4250.00
Service Level Agreements with Defra bodies	12600.00	12062.00	12062.00
Recharge (other departments)/refunds	0.00		720.10
Match Funding	1200.00		
Total income	75960.00	59942.00	78045.94
Balance (in £)	6049.80	31764.81	-180861.80

The balance figures for each year do not represent profit – the figures of surplus are already assigned to projects or staff costs and the opposite figures mainly show debit due to project or staff cost spend or matching assigned, from monies received in previous financial years. Some SLA monies have been received in different financial years to which they should have been received.