

NBIS Annual Report 2023/24



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 17,400 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.

2930 of these species are classified as 'Species of Conservation Concern'. This means they are rare, threatened or protected by law. NBIS also holds 118521 records of 139 invasive non-native species.

Based at County Hall, Norwich the service sits within the Natural Norfolk Team of the Environment Service 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.

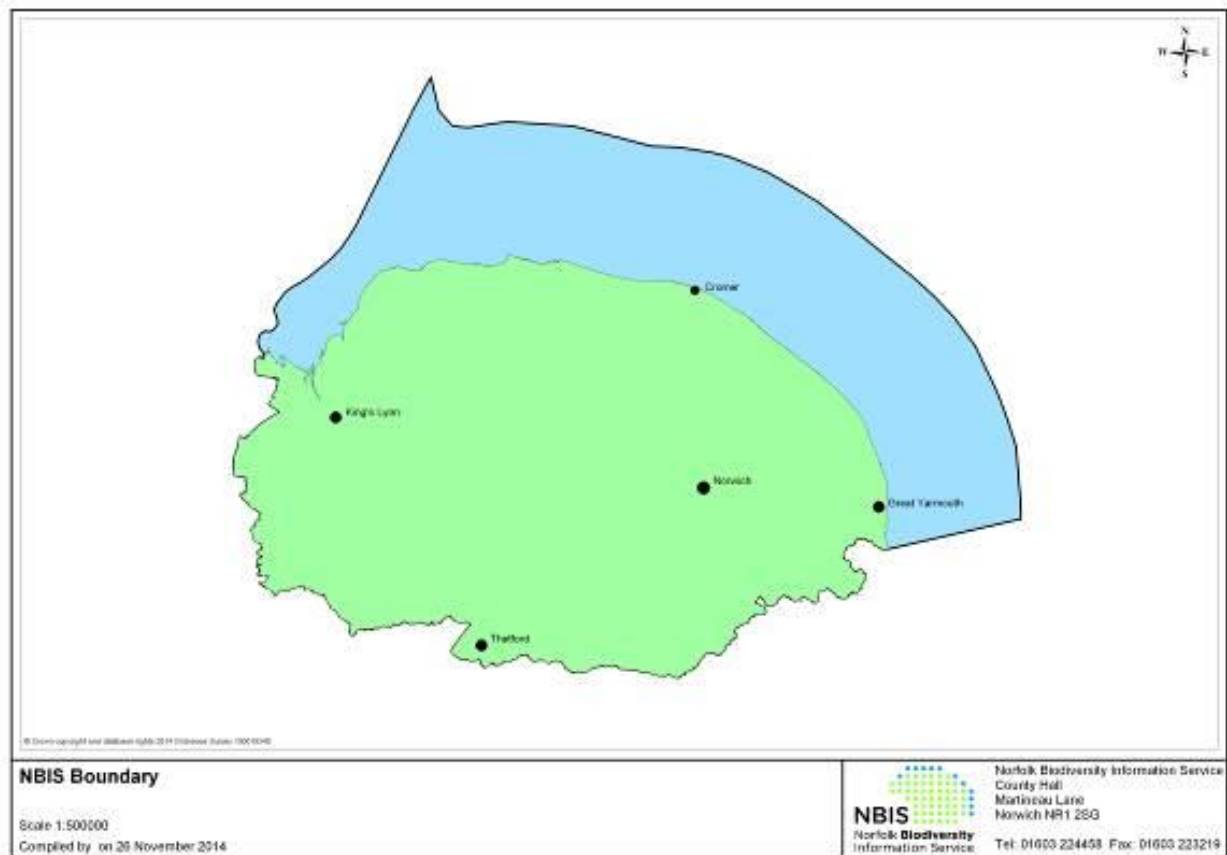
To fulfil this aim NBIS operates under the principles set out in its [Operational Framework](#).

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](#).

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 the data is of high quality, 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:

- Cherry Harper-Jones – Natural Norfolk Manager (1fte) – Line manages NBIS staff.
- Sam Neal – Biodiversity Officer (Information) (1fte) – Manages the day-to-day running of NBIS, 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) – Data management and project work.

Funding and Data Partners

Organisation	Type of Agreement
Norfolk County Council	Hosting Agreement
Environment Agency	Service Level Agreement
Anglian Water	Service Level Agreement
Norfolk Internal Drainage Board	Service Level Agreement
Middle Level Commissioners	Service Level Agreement
British Trust for Ornithology	Data Agreement
Norfolk Wildlife Trust	Data Exchange Agreement
People's Trust for Endangered Species	Data Exchange Agreement

7 ecological consultancies had an Ecological Consultant SLA for data searches.

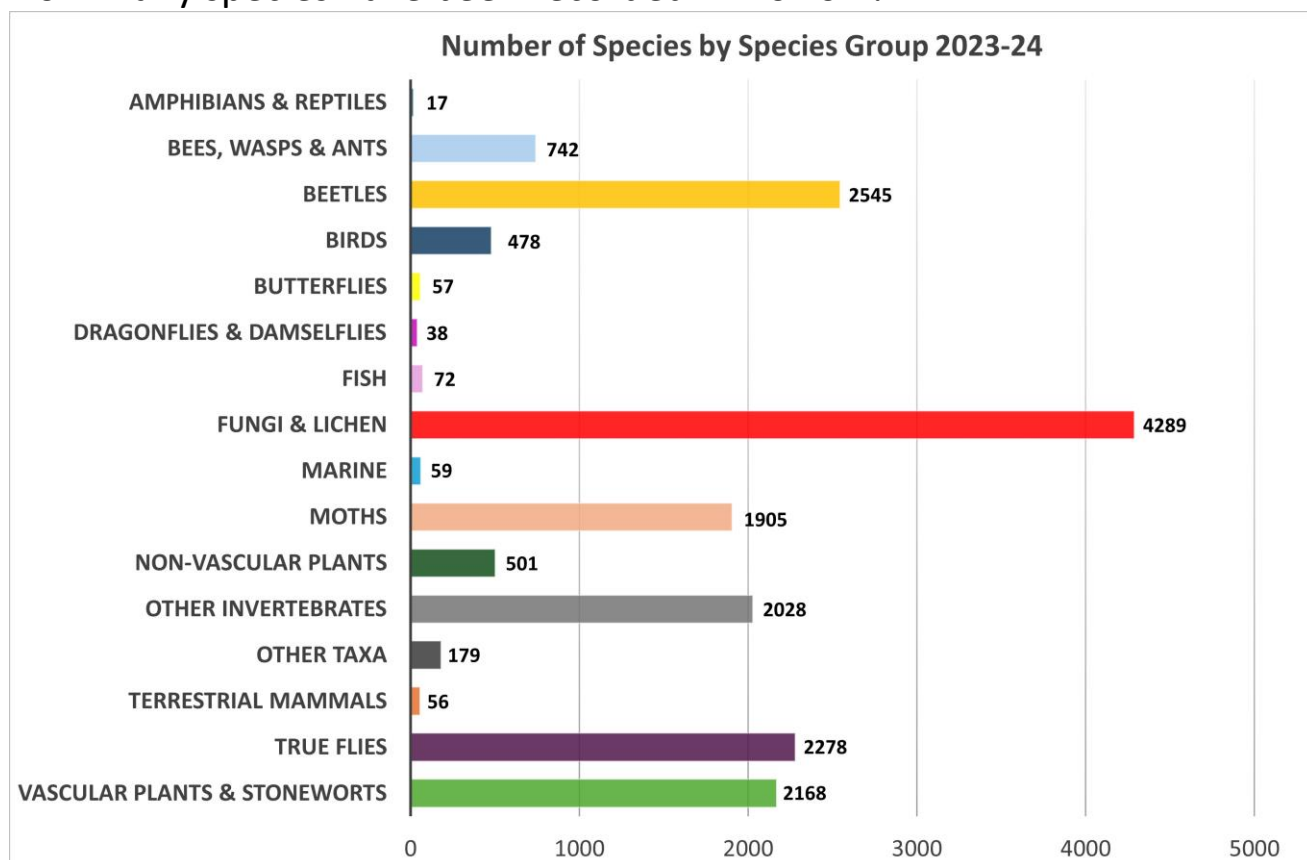
NBIS also has an important set of non-funding partners who provide essential support and encouragement. These include:

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

Data Holdings

The NBIS database currently contains **10,934,337 species records** (as of 31st March 2024, including a number from our neighbouring counties of Suffolk and Cambridgeshire, collated as part of cross-county biodiversity audits).

How many species have been recorded in Norfolk?



Species diversity in Norfolk, by taxonomic group (based on data held by NBIS, March 2024)

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 standard commercial and partner enquiries within 2 working days and all non-commercial enquiries within 10 working days. Timescales for more complex, non-standard enquiries are agreed with the requester.

NBIS continues to operate the East of England 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 minimum of a standard set of protected species and site data within 10 days.

Number of each enquiry type processed each year:

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Commercial Searches	539	595	617	612
Non-commercial Searches	64	50	63	51
Partner Searches (Including Districts)	5	3	16	21
TOTAL	608	648	696	684

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 2023-24 no significant projects were funded.

Regional and National Collaboration

NBIS joins other Record Centres within the East of England and staff attended two online regional Record Centre meetings during the year. The meetings facilitate discussion about sharing best practice, joint-working options and provide a regional overview.

Staff also attended the online ALERC Conference in October 2023.

NBIS staff attend twice yearly ORCA webinars. These webinars include all of the LERCs who currently use ORCA. The facilitate discussion and problem solving within the ORCA community as well as showcasing recent ORCA development and new features.

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.

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 draw up by ALERC to ensure LERC's are providing a good service to their users and providers. NBIS was reaccredited in 2020 for a further five years and will be re-assessed in 2025.

Local Sites Monitoring

NBIS has historically provided Norfolk data to Defra for SDL-160 on behalf of the Local Authority. SDL-160 is a national indicator for Local Sites in Positive Conservation Management. However it is no longer statutory. This lack of statutory status means it is of lower priority, but NBIS still plan to provide this indicator when resources allow, and this will then be made available to District Councils.

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 2023 update is available and downloadable to partners.

Event Attendance

Due to staff capacity, NBIS are currently not attending wildlife events to promote its work. Promotional material is made available to colleagues in the Natural Norfolk and Environment Service Teams when they attend appropriate events. It is hoped that event attendance will restart when capacity allows.

Annual Recorders Event

The Annual Joint NBIS and Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society Recorders' Event was held at the John Innes Centre at Norwich Research Park on the 2nd December 2023. The theme of the event was 'Freshwaters: Recording today for a better tomorrow'.

As in previous years a buffet lunch began proceedings, with a chance to catch up and network with friends and colleagues.

The keynote speaker for the event was Professor Carl Sayer from UL who spoke on Norfolk's wetlands: the challenge of change.

Further presentations included subjects ranging from recent threats to Norfolk's wetland biota and navigating the dynamics of aquatic ecosystems, to the effective use of citizen science and amphibian reintroductions.

Projects

Norwich City Biodiversity Baseline Study

The Biodiversity Baseline Study (BBS) for Norwich City Council was completed in early 2024. It involved an audit of biodiversity assets in Norwich, identifying opportunities and threats to that biodiversity and producing priorities and recommendations for managing biodiversity, and for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). The strategic significance metric developed during the BBS project has been adopted by Norwich City Council and will be used by planners regarding BNG. Biodiversity Character Areas for Norfolk were developed as was a survey and monitoring framework, to guide future survey and monitoring work in Norwich. The final BBS report is available on the Norwich City Council website at https://www.norwich.gov.uk/downloads/20615/norwich_biodiversity_baseline_study_2024

ORCA Enquiries Tool 6 Month Review

The new ORCA and My LERC enquiry system went live on 13th October 2022. The year 2022/23 saw an increase in search numbers – 710 searches, up from 672 in 2021/22. This includes a mixture of ‘old style’ searches, free test ORCA searches and ORCA searches since live date. From the small amount of feedback we have received, customers seem happy with the new service, which is faster, more efficient and has an interactive output. We have not experienced any major problems in running the system and enquiries now take up less time. The packages we set up seem to be working as we only have a small number of custom search requests.

Finance

The table below shows the budget for 2023-24 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 £)	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Staff salaries/training/travel/subsistence/conferences	-108044.83	-102716.40	-105370.00
IT hardware/software & general equipment purchase	-4345.88	-4095.88	-4083.88
Subscriptions (e.g. ALERC)	-820.00	-500.00	-570.00
Contractor costs	-38.00	-3,511.57	-5446.63
Venue hire/food costs etc			-377.15
Printing/marketing/design			
other/misc			
Publications/NBIS recorders fund/recorder support	-2115.00	-1606.22	-1000.00
Budget adjustments/financials		-2101.00	2101.00
Match Funding/project contributions/P&C contributions			
Total expenditure	-115363.71	-114531.07	-114746.66

Income (in £)	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Data Searches	62705.00	68167.31	75494.80
Project work/contracted works/other charges	38990.87	23263.99	32978.68
Service Level Agreements with Local Authorities/IDBs		3750.00	
Service Level Agreements with utilities	4288.25	4554.12	5505.07
Service Level Agreements with Defra bodies	12062.00	12062.00	12665.10
Recharge (other departments)/refunds			
Match Funding			
Total income	118046.12	111797.42	126643.65

Balance (in £)	2682.41	-2733.65	11896.99
-----------------------	----------------	-----------------	-----------------

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.