



Recording wildlife: getting started



Identifying wildflowers, Cherishing Churchyards Day, St Peter and St Paul's Church, Tonbridge © Kent wildlife Trust

Observing nature can be a wonderful pastime and can also help us to understand how best to manage our local wildlife areas. However, many people feel a bit daunted about trying to record wildlife and getting to grips with species identification. This leaflet has been designed to give some initial suggestions on how to get started. Unless otherwise stated, the contact details for all the organisations mentioned in this leaflet are listed in the Kent Wildlife Trust *List of Contact Details for Conservation Organisations*.

Why record wildlife sightings?

There are many reasons why it is important to record wildlife sightings:

- it is difficult to know how best to manage a site unless one has some idea as to what wildlife is already present
- robust scientific data is needed in order to inform legislation regarding wildlife

- the presence or absence of certain species (known as 'indicator species') can tell us a lot about the health of the local habitat
- many species have declined in the past few decades, mainly as a result of agricultural intensification and urban development. The reason we know this is because there are records to show that these species used to be more numerous in the past. The absence of records for a species can tell us almost as much about the current status of a species as the presence of records.
- there simply are not enough experts in Kent to get out there and record across the county regularly – we need more people to become involved
- recording wildlife can be a wonderful experience for people of all ages! It is never too late to start, it doesn't cost anything, and you can do it on your own or choose to make it into a social occasion. You can even let the whole world know about it through Facebook!

This advice sheet contains information about the following topics:

- why record wildlife sightings?
- where you should send your records
- what information do you need to record
- recording on a particular site
- running your own BioBlitz
- WildWalks
- improving your identification skills
- further advice and requests for surveys
- further reading and references



Trust volunteers doing a water vole survey at Holborough Marsh © D. Watson



The Trust's Conservation team outing – practising identification skills © Kent Wildlife Trust



Ragged robin © R.I.Moyse

Where you should send your records

If you would like to share your records more widely, then please send them to the Kent and Medway Biological Record Centre. In order for the staff and volunteers to input data more easily, some simple guidelines need to be followed, including using a spreadsheet and giving a grid reference. Please go to the 'Recording' tab on their website to find out more.

Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre (KMBRC)

Brogdale Farm Office, Brogdale Farm, Brogdale Road, Faversham, Kent ME13 8XZ.
 Email: info@kmbrc.org.uk
 Tel: 01795 532385
 Fax: 01795 532386
<http://www.kmbrc.org.uk/>

What information do you need to record?

- **who:** you, the recorder, and preferably a contact number or address in case of any queries
- **what:** the species and, if possible, whether

it is male or female or a juvenile, what stage of the lifecycle (caterpillar?), what condition the animal or plant was in (singing on a perch to indicate its territory, dead by the side of the road)

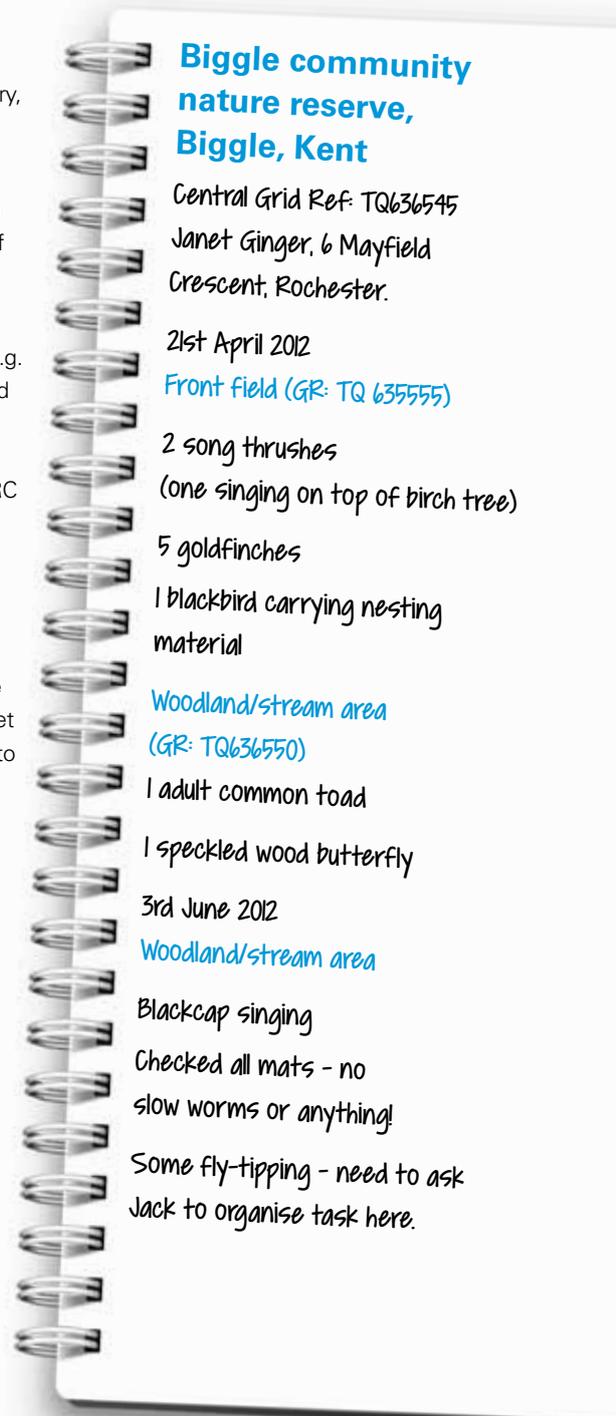
- **how many:** ideally, this needs to be as precise as possible. If you are recording something like spawn, then numbers of clumps of spawn will do!
- **where:** the name of the site or street name, and some notes about the site e.g. garden, industrial site. You will also need to give a postcode (if in your garden) or a grid reference if the record was taken out in the wider countryside (the KMBRC website tells you how to find a grid reference – see left for details).
- **when:** date, month and year

If you are not sure of your identification, why not sketch the plant or animal or take a photo and then check later, when you get back home. You can always send the photo to the KMBRC or to the Trust and we will do our best to identify it.

Soft shield fern
 © Kent Wildlife Trust



Children carrying out a survey
 © London Wildlife Trust



Biggle community nature reserve, Biggle, Kent

Central Grid Ref: TQ636545
 Janet Ginger, 6 Mayfield Crescent, Rochester.

21st April 2012

Front field (GR: TQ 635555)

2 song thrushes
 (one singing on top of birch tree)

5 goldfinches

1 blackbird carrying nesting material

Woodland/stream area
 (GR: TQ636550)

1 adult common toad

1 speckled wood butterfly

3rd June 2012

Woodland/stream area

Blackcap singing

Checked all mats - no slow worms or anything!

Some fly-tipping - need to ask Jack to organise task here.



Southern hawker © J.Shorter



Holly blue © T.Connor

Recording on a particular site

If you are trying to build up a set of records for a particular site such as a churchyard, garden or school grounds, maybe just out of interest or because it will help to inform management plans for the site, then we suggest the following:

- collate all the current records for the site (you may need to spend some time deciphering old paper records), preferably onto a spreadsheet on a computer
- think about what time you have to spend on recording: one visit a week? once a month? systematic recording or ad hoc? are other people recording on the site too?
- if you have little time, then a simple list of species seen, with a date and a note on specific location within the site, should be enough. This can help to inform any management as well, such as where to cut the grass and what time of year. As the records build up, think about what species groups are not being recorded (lichens, invertebrates other than butterflies, small mammals and bats are often problematic) and how you will try to find out more about those groups (see KMBRC webpage on Field Survey Techniques). If there are any local people who might have

expertise in some species groups, then ask them to help you.

- if you have a large site and/or more time to record, then have a look at the Field Surveying Techniques on the KMBRC website to look at alternative methods of recording such as transects

Running your own BioBlitz

One way of rapidly finding out about the wildlife present on your site is to organise a BioBlitz, which is a quick one day/24 hour bout of intense recording, of any species found, with as many people recording as possible (all abilities welcome, experts and beginners alike). The Bristol Natural History Consortium provides good information on how to organise successful events, with hints and tips, resources and examples of past BioBlitzes. For further details about the National BioBlitz Network, please go to <http://www.bnhc.org.uk/home/bioblitz/>

WildWalks - help us map the impact of our landscape conservation work

The Wildlife Trusts have recently launched WildWalks, an online recording system allowing members of the public to map records of plants and animals across their local Living Landscape projects. The objective is to develop a better understanding of the impact of our landscape conservation work and to give people the opportunity to help with this.

WildWalks has been developed through the LivingMap project, established by The Wildlife

Trusts in partnership with the British Trust for Ornithology, as an online wildlife recording tool. We want to encourage the public, whether expert recorders or those with less expertise, to get out and explore our nature reserves and Living Landscapes areas such as the Medway Smile, the Darent Triangle or Sevenoaks Living Landscape (SOLL) in an effort to help us map nature as it changes.

Through WildWalks, users will be able to record wildlife sightings against designated walks which can be created by users or selected from recommended walks produced by Kent Wildlife Trust. The areas we are asking people to walk in and record wildlife are places where the Trust is targeting landscape conservation efforts working with partners to try and secure nature's recovery.

If you are interested in using these recording tools to help us map the impact of our conservation work more information can be found at www.livingmap.org.uk or via links on living landscape pages of the Kent Wildlife Trust website.



BioBlitz with Canterbury University at Darland Banks © Canterbury Christchurch University

Improving your identification skills

Useful websites:

- Buglife
- Bumblebee Conservation Trust
- Butterfly Conservation
- Kent Bat Group
- Kent Mammal Group
- KMBRC (McClintock library)
- Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group
- Plantlife
- Pond Conservation
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- Woodland Trust

The Natural History Museum: the postcode plants database will tell you what native species tend to be found in your postcode area: <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/life/plants-fungi/postcode-plants/intro.html>

Courses

- Kent Wildlife Trust provides a whole programme of introductory one day courses led by specialists in their field. Topics range from orchids to ferns, spiders, bats and bumblebees, and courses will provide you with an excellent starting point as well as catering for those with a little more knowledge.

<http://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/discover-learn/wildlife-study-days>



- other conservation organisations in Kent also tend to organise courses every year, so it is worth checking their websites regularly.
- the Field Studies Council (FSC) has a national programme of courses for families and individuals. Courses are run at different levels and at many centres throughout the country. For further details, please contact the Field Studies Council by calling 01743 852100 or emailing enquiries@field-studies-council.org or visiting their website www.field-studies-council.org/

Kent Field Club field visits

The Kent Field Club organises visits to various sites in Kent for most of the year. They are often led by specialists and, although they don't tend to focus on any one species group, the visits provide an excellent opportunity to improve identification skills. You can attend a taster session, but after that you will need to become a member (£8/year). www.kentfieldclub.org.uk

Events

Kent Wildlife Trust and many other organisations provide a whole range of walks and talks throughout the year. Look out for our Events leaflet: there are always events focussing on specific groups such as farmland birds or butterflies and many events are free.



Identification books for beginners

Field Studies Centre pull-out leaflets are ideal for carrying out in the field. These can be bought at our Trust Visitor Centres. Alternatively, you can order online or by calling the FSC office (see above for details).

There is a very wide range of reference books available for both beginners and more advanced naturalists.

Requests for surveys

If you would like more information about our professional services, such as habitat or species surveys, ecological scoping surveys or Ecological Impact Assessments, then please do get in touch with Kent Wildlife Trust. There is usually a charge for these services, although we can sometimes access funding to help cover the costs. If we cannot help, we will do our best to advise you who can.

Further reading and references

Kent Wildlife Trust

List of Contact Details for Conservation Organisations

Obtaining further advice

For further information on any of the topics covered in this leaflet, please email info@kentwildlife.org.uk or call 01622 662012.



Display of devil's-bit scabious on traditional pasture © Kent Wildlife Trust



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