



## Cofnod – your Local Records Centre

Cofnod? One of the first questions, certainly outside of Wales, is what does our name mean? It is the Welsh word for record. Next, 'what do you do?' What is a 'Local Records Centre?' 'Will you take my old vinyl albums?!' It's difficult to explain the concept, as our office consists of 6 desks and associated PCs plus a few filing cabinets. Nothing to really grab the imagination, although our walls are plastered with posters of the wildlife we are working towards conserving and occasionally get outside to see. We have a small team of staff, which is enhanced through regular volunteer involvement and occasional staff on short term contract. Based in Bangor our 'Local' area is North Wales, including six Unitary Authorities, the Snowdonia National Park and five Vice Counties (areas often used to record wildlife). This is quite a bit compared to many other Local Records Centres, which may cover a single county. Our area also includes a wide variety of habitats and therefore species recording opportunities. From high mountain to coastal, and although our remit stops at the shoreline, we do accept the occasional marine records too.



Along with three other Local Records Centres (LRC) in Wales, Cofnod forms part of the only national network of LRCs anywhere in the UK. Together we are working to provide the largest wildlife database in Wales, totalling over 6 million records and rising.

### What do we do?

Our main aim is to bring together the vast amount of information which has been, and is being, collected on wildlife in North Wales. The scale of the task itself is impossible to quantify, as this information stretches back for centuries and is increasing daily as one-by-one new records are created by a wide variety of different people. The information may be held on paper or in electronic formats, with some of these being quite difficult to extract in a useable format. We tend to prioritise electronic data, as entering data from paper records takes a considerable amount of time. However staff and volunteers have already managed to extract large numbers of valuable records from important paper datasets, including over 70,000 records from the Countryside Council for Wales and over 10,000 records from the Cambrian Ornithological Society. The Cofnod species database now holds over 1.5 million records (see the front page of our website for an up to date figure), which is still only a small proportion of the data that we know is out there. We also hold a range of information on the location of habitats, sites with statutory protection and locally designated Wildlife Sites.



What happens to the data once it is collated into this vast database? It is supplied to various decision makers, including public bodies like the Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Local Planning Authorities as well as ecological consultants. Together income generated from these sectors finance our existence through various on-going agreements or one-off payments for services. We operate as a 'not-for-profit' organisation so we make our charges in line with our operating costs.

Depending on the conservation status of the species, a record submitted to us may find its way onto one of our weekly 'Planning

List Screening' reports, submitted to 5 of the 7 Local Authorities in North Wales. Or it may be used by NRW to assess water extraction consents, or Welsh Government to decide if there are any important species to consider when assessing agri-environment scheme applications. All these methods mean that the data is directly contributing to better wildlife conservation throughout North Wales, a process which was virtually impossible before Cofnod existed.

All information generated from our database gets labelled so that the data user can access information about the dataset which it belongs. The '**Data We Hold**' page on our website is a good place to browse details of what information we hold and see the wide variety of individual recorders and organisations which supply us with data, and upon whom we are ultimately reliant in order to fulfil our aim of making high quality wildlife data available to decision makers.

### **The importance of local experts**

Local species experts are especially important to Cofnod, not only in terms of supplying data to us, often collated from a large number of individual recorders, but also in helping maintain high data standards. To date we have relied upon their involvement in checking ad-hoc records submitted to us, especially through our website. However we are gradually making all relevant data for their particular area and species interest available to them for reference and also to allow them to identify any data quality issues. All of these local experts are volunteers; often working on behalf of a National Scheme or Society and without their valuable input Cofnod would not function.



### **Observe, Record and Share using Cofnod's Online Recording System!**

Our systems for data collation and storage have been developed to take advantage of opportunities for information sharing using the internet. We encourage recorders to submit records to us using our Online Recording System (ORS), one of the first systems of its kind in the UK. This allows people to submit a record to us as long as they have internet access. Free and easy to use, this system has been designed for both expert and novice recorders. Once submitted a record is made available almost immediately to the relevant a Local Expert for checking, and after that it will be ready for use in the Cofnod database. Users are able to log in and see any of their records at any time, allowing them to view all or a sub-set of their records on an online map.

The ORS is the ideal data supply route for us, as we do not have to spend time re-formatting electronic data to make it suitable for our database. Also the possibility of misinterpreting handwriting and meaning, common problems when entering records from a paper format, is limited. We have been working with various groups and individuals to help customise the online data entry process which means we are steadily increasing the proportion of records we receive using this. It is a

popular option for someone who does not want all the complications of maintaining their own database.



We welcome all wildlife records, offering a variety of ways to submit them using the Online Recording System, email, post and phone. You may also prefer to submit them to your local expert recorder or through a national recording scheme or project. The crucial thing is sharing these records, as without this others cannot use them to aid the understanding and conservation of species.

### **Training, surveys and other events**

Cofnod has an online '**Calendar**' with details of many events, surveys and training courses which are of relevance to wildlife recorders in North Wales. We also send out a monthly email digests ('On the Record'), with details of what is happening locally over the coming month or so (you'll need to register on our website to receive this). We would be delighted to receive details of any events which you would like us to advertise.

Every year we run a series of short training courses, where we invite local and national experts to share their knowledge of recording species. Topics for our courses have included fungi, snails, sheildbugs, bumblebees, birds and lichens. Our courses are aimed at either complete beginners or people wishing to increase their knowledge; they tend to be quite specialist so that we don't compete with other training courses available in the region. The courses we run are announced primarily though our website and 'On the Record', so visit it regularly to see what's coming up in your area.



For several years we have been involved in running 'BioBlitz' events, which is usually where a group of experts are challenged to record as many species on a site over 24 hours. Our main role is to collate data as it comes in from the field, but we often get involved in ensuring the event has enough local expert recorders to make it viable. Full results from all Bioblitzs are shown on our website.

Our annual conference usually takes place in October and is a great way to find out what's happening locally. Usually we attract around 70 people to the conference and have included talks from local recorders on wide variety of topics. Keep an eye out for the date of the conference and the online booking form from our website.

### **Small but well formed**

So even though Cofnod is a relatively small organisation covering a large area and a huge range of species, we hope we provide a useful service to recorders, decision makers and members of the public. If you are interested in knowing more about what we do please visit our website at [www.cofnod.org.uk](http://www.cofnod.org.uk) , contact us on 01248 672603 or by email [contactus@cofnod.org.uk](mailto:contactus@cofnod.org.uk). Also please follow us on Twitter [www.twitter.com/cofnod](http://www.twitter.com/cofnod) or Like us on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/cofnod](http://www.facebook.com/cofnod) .



### **Roy Tapping – Manager of Cofnod**

January 2014