

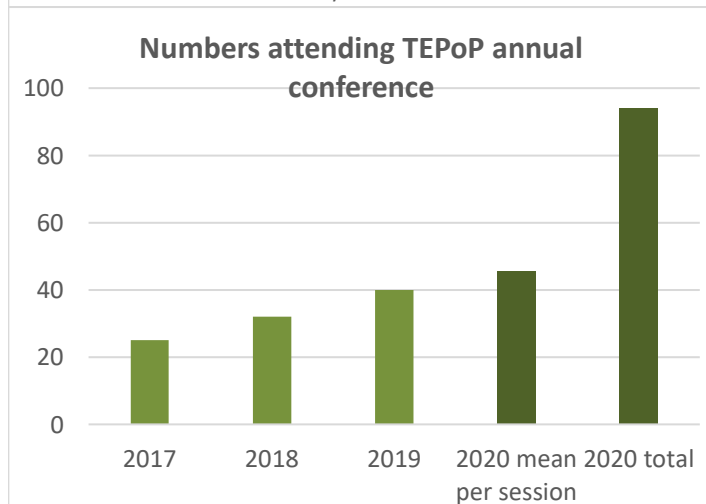
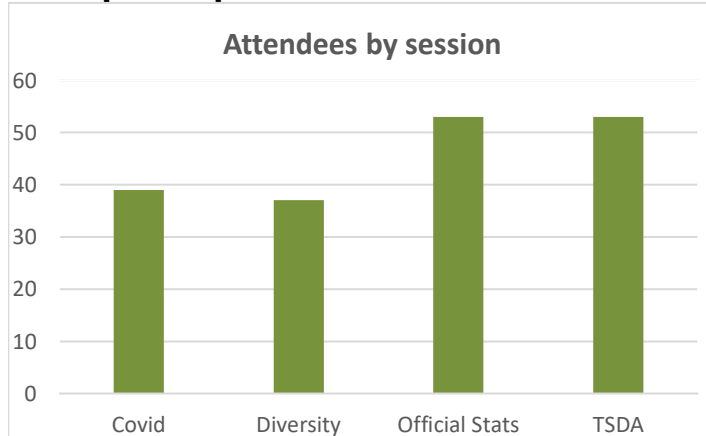
# TEPoP 2020: Online Seminar series



2020 marked the 4<sup>th</sup> year since we set up the Terrestrial Evidence Partnership of Partnerships – a collaboration of partners in JNCC’s biodiversity monitoring schemes as well as policy representatives from Defra, the devolved administrations, and government agencies.

Whilst Covid-19 has reduced our ability to meet up face to face, we are conscious the opportunity to engage with each other and share our experiences and ideas is more important than ever. As such, instead of our usual annual conference, in 2020 we decided to hold a series of four online events in September and October, with a mix of presentations, Q&A sessions, and breakout groups. We were really pleased to have such great engagement, with over 90 people joining at least one session – so significantly more than have attended the in-person event in previous years. We had some really useful discussions on the topics of volunteer diversity, the impacts of Covid-19 on our schemes, and habitat recording in our schemes. We also heard lots of interesting presentations from a variety of speakers, with special thanks to our TEPoP guests, Ed Humpherson and Penny Babb from the Office for Statistics Regulation.

## 2020 participation in an online world...



Approximate numbers of people who have attended the TEPoP sessions this year and over the past few years.

Despite some initial teething issues with the technology, we were pleased that the online approach worked well.

Admittedly there were pros and cons. The opportunity for informal networking was more limited, and it was slightly more challenging to facilitate breakout groups - but there were also big positives resulting from this new way of doing things.

The online format enabled us to invite more people this year, and made it easier for more people to take part. We particularly noticed increased participation from people who are based some distance from where we have held the conference in previous years. We also noticed an increase in the number of individuals organisations could send as the barrier of travel time and expense was removed.

Not everyone attended each session. The average attendance per session was higher than last year’s attendance, but to a lesser extent. People were able to be more selective and only attended the sessions that they were particularly interested in. We were pleased to receive lots of positive feedback on how helpful the sessions were.

**Participating organisations:** Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust, Animal and Plant Health Agency, Buglife, Butterfly Conservation, Bat Conservation Trust, Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland, British Trust for Ornithology, Chilterns Conservation Board, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (Northern Ireland), Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Forestry Commission, Forestry Commission Scotland, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Natural England, Natural Resources Wales, Nature Scot, National Museums Northern Ireland, Office for Statistics Regulation, NBN Trust, People’s Trust for Endangered Species, Plantlife, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture, UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Welsh Government, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.

## **Session 1 – Covid-19 and TEPoP schemes- impacts, opportunities and lessons learned**

28<sup>th</sup> September 2020

Covid-19 restrictions have had a significant impact across TEPoP schemes this year, including in terms of how we interact with volunteers, and in terms of the amount of data that was able to be collected. Whilst ad hoc recording from gardens has increased, we had to temporarily ask volunteers to stop taking part in our structured surveys during the first lockdown in line with government lockdown rules. Even once the lockdown eased, we had to bear in mind ongoing restrictions, for example around travel, differing local restrictions, and the importance of promoting health and safety best practice. In addition, the NBMP's bat hibernation survey has not been able to resume due to concerns about the potential for disease transfer between bats and humans.

This webinar included insightful presentations from Rachel Murphy (Plantlife) on how the National Plant Monitoring Scheme (NPMS) has been embracing online engagement with volunteers, and from Dawn Balmer (BTO) on analytical considerations resulting from the reduced level of data collected this year. Both these presentations were followed by useful detailed breakout group discussions (summarised below) sharing our different experiences and considering in more detail how these topics relate to our range of monitoring schemes.

Anna Robinson (JNCC) concluded the webinar with a presentation on building resilience in our schemes and embracing new opportunities. Covid-19 has highlighted the value of people engaging with nature, and also the need for biodiversity data to feed into a 'green recovery' – both of which are areas where our volunteer-based monitoring schemes can play a part. We are keen to ensure that the value of our schemes is realised and that we continue to look for new opportunities to make our schemes as useful and relevant as possible.

### ***Volunteer engagement – key messages***

- Schemes reported mixed responses of volunteers to the situation during the first lockdown, and as lockdown eased. Some were grateful for the lack of pressure to survey, many were frustrated at not being able to get out, but overall volunteers were largely compliant and understanding of the situation.
- Schemes organisers valued the cross-scheme discussions organised by BTO, and the link through to government agencies, helping them to develop and present a more joined up approach.
- The value of online engagement with volunteers was realised, helping to keep volunteers interested even when they couldn't complete surveys.
- NPMS developed a weekly online training programme which proved very popular and helped to up-skill volunteers. The online format enabled more people to take part and volunteers were very positive, with some asking why we didn't embrace this approach sooner!
- A key recommendation is to increase 'evergreen' resources – e.g. recording training sessions and having them available online for volunteers to revisit at any time.

### ***Analytical implications – key messages***

- We have a lot less data for many schemes, particularly from the spring. Some will not be able to report (e.g. seabird breeding success, natterjack toad surveys).
- Other schemes will be able to report, but there are various issues to consider including level of data collected, temporal and spatial biases in data, and shifts in recorder behaviour (less recording in nature reserves, more in gardens).
- We are likely to have gaps in some country breakdowns of results even if we can still produce UK level results.
- Analytical methods could help address biases – but there may be resource issues as extra work needed – and we need to consider if adapting analyses might make things more complicated in the longer-term.
- Important to be clear on levels of certainty when presenting results.
- Need to consider messaging to volunteers and implications. If we can produce something with this year's data then we need to ensure volunteers don't feel their usual more thorough data collection is not valued or necessary.

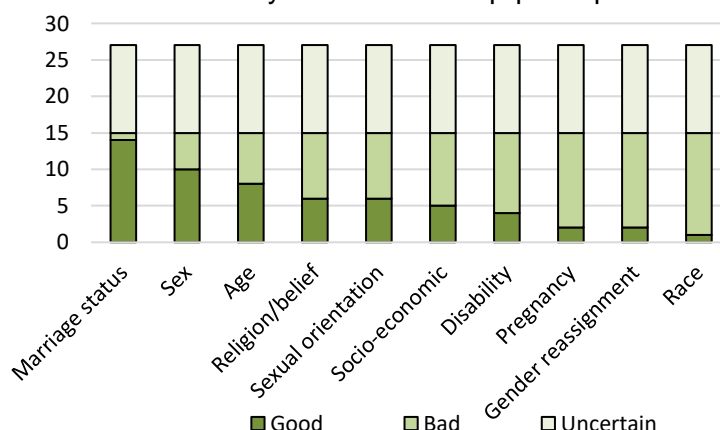
## Session 2 - Volunteer diversity in TEPoP schemes

7<sup>th</sup> October 2020

The current global focus on diversity, equality and inclusion is very relevant in the ecological sector, particularly noting that participants in our monitoring schemes are disproportionately white. This has prompted conversations about what we can do to enhance the opportunities and accessibility of nature across everyone in the population, regardless of ethnicity or other characteristics. During this webinar participants discussed the types of volunteer diversity that are currently important to schemes; past projects that have tackled diversity; ideas for projects that could help us target priority diversity areas; and short to long term actions we would like to take towards breaking down barriers to participation.

### What do we know?

Some schemes have carried out surveys on participation in the past, and there is some anecdotal knowledge of who is involved, although data on volunteers is not collected routinely and there is a lot of uncertainty. The graph shows the results of a quick poll in the workshop, asking participants to estimate how good they think volunteer diversity currently is in schemes. Twenty-seven workshop participants took part in the poll, with 12 indicating that they were unsure for all categories. The categories where the most participants thought schemes had good diversity were for marriage status, sex and age, with most people thinking race was the least diverse characteristic. Discussions that followed indicated some differences between schemes, for example the Wetland Birds Survey has mostly males taking part, whereas the National Bat Monitoring Programme and UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme have a more even gender balance. Many schemes reported an older demographic taking part.



### Overcoming participation barriers

The workshop considered the different types of diversity and how they were relevant to our schemes. By considering where there were barriers for people in taking part we can consider where we can make changes to promote inclusivity. Some barriers are easier to address than others and there may be trade-offs. The biggest participation barrier for many people may be access to designated sample points – whilst we don't want to abandon the random stratified sample locations many schemes use for scientific robustness, there are still options such as supplementary surveys that could be carried out closer to home, online training, and improving community links - which could lead to more lift-sharing in the future. Often barriers impact multiple types of diversity, for example people who struggle with transport are more likely to be disabled, young, or more socio-economically deprived. Living in an urban area may be a barrier to accessing nature, and is correlated with other types of diversity such as race.

### Suggested Recommendations - Many ideas were suggested – here are just a few examples!

Short term actions	Long term actions
Review terminology used in schemes to make the scheme more accessible	Consolidate and share good practice, e.g. from successful case studies
Survey of volunteers (or add to sign up form) to find out what diversity exists in schemes currently and can be used to measure future change success	Ask national charities working with disabilities about how we can make schemes more inclusive and work with them to achieve this
Better use of social media and/or celebrity 'champions' to engage more diverse audiences	Make schemes more relevant to encouraging recording in an urban environment
Speak to groups who are promoting engagement with nature in specific communities - what are their needs and opportunities?	Consider ways to work in partnership with community organisations - considering what the priorities of these other organisations might be
BTO Youth Ambassador and Representative project is a great step forward in co design; consider if it's possible to expand across other recording groups	Consider how to cross promote with other volunteering opportunities (e.g. recruit recorders from green gyms or social prescribing; but also promote green gyms to people trying recording but it not meeting their needs)

### **Session 3 - Official Statistics**

15<sup>th</sup> October 2020

The annual results of many of our TEPoP biodiversity monitoring schemes are published as Official Statistics. The production of 'Official Statistics' is set out in legislation. They can be published by a specified list of public bodies – including JNCC – and their production follows the Code of Practice for Statistics. In the first half of this seminar Anna Robinson (JNCC) introduced the range of Official Statistics we produce, how they feed in the UK Biodiversity Indicators (a 'National Statistic'), the key implications for schemes, and the communication opportunity. Publishing statistics as 'Official Statistics' can increase the perceived credibility and impact of our scheme results.

In the second half of the seminar Ed Humpherson and Penny Babb from the Office for Statistics Regulation shared more detail on the Code of Practice for Statistics and its 3 pillars: Trustworthiness, Quality, and Value. They also shared the benefits of organisations following these principles even for statistical releases that are not designated as Official Statistics (aka 'voluntary compliance').

Lots of guidance on official statistics and the code of practice is available on the Office for Statistics Regulation website, and JNCC have produced some bespoke guidance for TEPoP schemes. This covers issues including: the need to control who sees the statistics in advance, producing and publishing high quality statistics, considerations around timings, and reporting breaches.

### **Session 4 - TSDA webinar on:**

**1) Recording habitats and TEPoP schemes**

**2) Volunteer retention and participation in citizen science**

19<sup>th</sup> October 2020

The Terrestrial Surveillance Development and Analysis (TSDA) project is a partnership between JNCC, BTO and UKCEH, focussing on development and analysis work that can benefit the range of areas included in the TEPoP partnership. For this final webinar, two areas of work were presented from the TSDA project.

The first work area, presented by Rob Robinson (BTO), was on the potential for volunteers involved in biodiversity recording to also record habitat characteristics. This happens to an extent in some of our TEPoP monitoring schemes, but there are questions over the habitat classification level, required frequency of recording, and volunteer motivation and abilities. Whilst most scheme participants are particularly interested in the focal taxa of their scheme, recording habitats may have some specific interest to the scheme and its volunteers – for example in helping to understand species habitat associations. Rob also highlighted the links between ground surveyors and EO habitat mapping and how they can complement each other. Following the presentation participants joined break out groups for an opportunity to discuss views on series of issues related to volunteer habitat recording, including: when and why we might want to record habitats; what aspects /scales to record at; when use of volunteers is the most appropriate approach; and insights on volunteer preferences and motivations. BTO are reflecting on discussions as they finalise a habitat recording framework guide for schemes.

The second work area was presented by Michael Pocock (UKCEH) on an analysis of volunteer retention throughout the different stages of engagement with recording schemes, and a look at the evenness of recording – i.e. whether a few individuals submit the majority of records. The analysis covered 39 diverse recording projects, with different levels of promotion, ease of participation, and engagement with participants. The analysis showed that structured monitoring schemes had a higher number of people who participated in more than one year, and persistence in recorders increases after the first year of recording. Also, unsurprisingly, but of interest, higher levels of engagement (e.g. feedback to volunteers) results in a higher level of volunteer persistence. The evenness of recording varied depending on the type of project. Structured monitoring schemes tended to have greater recording evenness than ad hoc recording schemes. The fact that many people just submit a very low number of records in ad hoc recording schemes may demonstrate that such schemes are easy to take part in and are reaching a wide audience. However, the challenge is now to encourage retained and increased interest and engagement.