



The e-newsletter of the UK Biodiversity Action Reporting System

First Edition

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Editors Letter Launch of the BARS newsletter

Welcome along to this, the first edition of eNews, a new electronic newsletter for BARS. We aim to issue these on a quarterly basis to keep you up to speed with BARS developments. We also hope to include broader biodiversity reporting articles and news wherever possible.

The last six months have seen a lot of change, with new starters and leavers explained in the Staff Update. Despite this, and the spending challenges faced by most public sector partnerships this year, we have made good progress with a programme of development. This has been helpfully informed by feedback and experience received in part through the online survey many of you participated in.

This newsletter, itself delayed, represents a turning point with us now in a clearer position to share details of how we hope to improve BARS over the next 8 months. They are ambitious plans, but we think they will offer exciting new possibilities for the future of biodiversity action reporting.

BARS Team Update



Oliver Grafton
Programme Manager

Katharine Parkes
Project Officer

John Bedford
Technical Assistant

Megan Ellershaw left the post of BARS programme manager in September last year, taking up a new role within the Environmental Advice & Analysis Team in Natural England. The team would like to thank Megan for all her work on BARS, and wishes her all the best in her new role.

In June 2009, Katharine Parkes joined the team as BARS project officer. Kat has led the user support and training elements of the BARS programme. Unfortunately Katharine has been on sick leave since April. Many thanks to all of you that have sent get well messages. We hope she be able to return to work soon. We have not been able to cover her post fully and this has impacted our capacity to provide user support over the last three months.

Oliver Grafton took up post as the new BARS programme manager in January 2010. In his previous role Oliver provided the lead on data sharing and usage issues for the National Biodiversity Network. Over the last 6 months he has got up to speed with the history of BARS and the difficulties faced by the current system. Oliver is very enthusiastic about the positive role a revitalised and focussed action reporting system can play in supporting the biodiversity community. The team are confident that BARS will quickly evolve, helping plan, coordinate and report how we are working to protect and recover important habitat and species across the UK.

BARS Online Survey Many Thanks!

Your experience is helping us improve BARS

The BARS team would like to thank all of you that completed the online user survey way back in December. With 573 submissions we had an excellent response. A link to the survey questions was issued to the 4653 email addresses registered on BARS. Here are just a few key messages we drew from the survey results...

| | England | Northern Ireland | Scotland | Wales |
|--------------------|------------|------------------|-----------|------------|
| % | 73.7% | 6.4% | 17.6% | 23.3% |
| Individuals | 415 | 36 | 99 | 131 |

- A lot of you find a large proportion of BARS confusing to use. This discourages you from entering data and reporting regularly.
- The potential overlap with other information systems was raised. Several of you felt the chore of data entry could be reduced via direct importing from such systems.
- The majority of you feel that BARS could help you further, but the system could be improved to make the benefits stronger and easier to realise. You are keen to see general

simplification of the system, clearer guidance on how to use it and the introduction of mapping tools.

- Over three quarters of you think a stronger geospatial function in BARS would be useful, although some had reservations about the system becoming more complex. It is felt that carefully implemented mapping tools could bring many benefits for planning as well as reporting biodiversity action more effectively. Respondents felt it would provide a clearer picture of biodiversity work and would put actions in context and allow for better linking across organisations/geographical areas, etc.
- Many of you are keen for a stronger BARS community supported through better communication and possibly an online forum.
- Most respondents would prefer an e-bulletin for receiving updates and other communications around BARS.

How we used your feedback

The results from the online survey fed directly into the development programme for this year. We used them to help focus specific consultation exercises and reach a set of detailed development requirements. As promised there will be opportunities to engage and feedback on new development as it becomes available to trial throughout the remainder of 2010/11. Please read the 'BARS is changing' article for further details.

Biodiversity Action Reporting : What's the point ?

The value of biodiversity action information

Information about the biodiversity action partners undertake has been seen as central to Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) reporting since 1999. BARS was created to collate information about biodiversity action plans and help report on their progress. Since the last UK BAP reporting round the role and usefulness of collating information about biodiversity action has been questioned, especially in comparison to information about biodiversity status and trends. There remains a strong case for using information about biodiversity action to inform future reporting. Biodiversity action information can tell us:

- **Progress with priority habitats:** In the absence of comprehensive field survey, information about habitat management carried out by partners can be collated to indicate the total area of each priority habitat being created, restored or maintained. This information can also help identify sites for future condition assessment.
- **Action for priority species:** In the absence of comprehensive field survey, information about action taken to benefit priority species can help build knowledge of sites and direct future surveys for population and range.
- **Inform biodiversity action planning:** Information about the biodiversity action carried out within an area will help partners plan their own action. Limited knowledge of what others are doing for biodiversity is a constraint to more coordinated and collaborative partnership work.

- **Whether our intervention is working:** Used in combination with sample field survey and monitoring, biodiversity action information helps analysis of whether our actions are benefiting biodiversity and where.

Biodiversity Action Reporting 2004 to 2010

Significant data gaps limited the actual contribution BARS was able to make to either of the last two UK BAP reporting rounds. It is believed that these data gaps can be attributed to three primary causes:

- **BAP theory vs. biodiversity practice:** Data to has be entered in a way that conforms to the BAP process. Many partners undertake positive biodiversity management that is not part of the formal BAP process. As a result partners are reluctant to enter information.
- **Corporate Information Systems:** Data has to be entered manually. Many large partners already have a requirement to record similar data within their own internal information systems. They are reluctant to repeat the effort by entering it into BARS as well.
- **Lack of automation:** For effective reports BARS relies heavily on users being able and willing to manually link their biodiversity action to a particular Biodiversity Action Plan or identify which targets (local, country and UK) it contributes to. Many have not done this.

Biodiversity Action Reporting post 2010 vision

Natural England is managing a programme of improvement to BARS in 2010/11. Improvement work is focussed on addressing the shortcomings which have hampered contribution to biodiversity reporting thus far. To encourage use it is vital that BARS has a clear role with benefits for those carrying out biodiversity action on the ground as well as those responsible for Country and UK reporting. In the future BARS will aim to better support biodiversity action planning as well as more effective reporting across the full UK biodiversity partnership.

Development in 2010/11 BARS is Changing!

BARS Development Programme

We are undertaking a significant programme of development to improve BARS throughout 2010/11. Your feedback and advice, provided through the online survey, targeted questionnaires and several consultation workshops, has helped us define set of development requirements. These were signed off by the Steering Group in April and are framed against three areas of use...

- Planning biodiversity action,
- Recording information about biodiversity action,
- Reporting information about biodiversity action,

We will continue to consult you on the development of new and improved functionality as it is developed. Our main focus will be on three practical pilot areas agreed by the BARS Steering Group. These are the East of England, the South East of England and Wales.

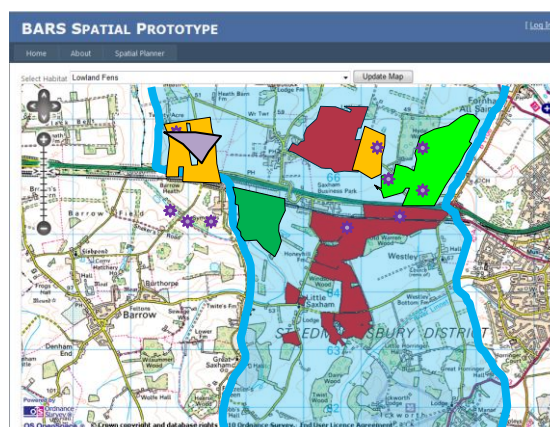
What we aim to introduce by April 2011

Our objective is to produce a more visual, user friendly and future proof version of BARS. Many of the requirements are significant and will take time to accommodate. There is a need to prioritise what is tackled first. In prioritising we have attempted to strike a balance between the requests of BARS users, the strategic reporting needs of our funding partners, and the technical implications of

implementation. All being well we hope to complete the following areas of development by April 2011.

1) Powerful Mapping Functions:

We are introducing geographic mapping tools which will offer new ways for you to visualise and report biodiversity action across a landscape. It will follow a similar format to other mapping tools like Google Maps and the NBN Gateway. Not only will this functionality allow you to display the action occurring across an area, it will also offer powerful reporting tools. The new BARS should be able to tell you how much land is recorded as being under management to maintain woodland in Bedford Purlieus NNR, in Bedfordshire as a whole, in the East of England, in England and within the UK.



Proof of concept illustration

2) Improved Action Capture:

We plan to develop new action capture tools supported by new data standards for action information. We think there are three critical pieces of information that BARS must capture if it is to report biodiversity action more effectively:

1. **Action Type:** Action categories are to be streamlined and, although other action types will continue to be accommodated, our main focus will be on agreeing a set of useful categories habitat and species management.
2. **Action Location:** The introduction of mapping capabilities will make knowing the exact location of actions much more valuable. New tools will allow users to describe the location of their action at a scale appropriate to the action type.
3. **BAP Feature:** It will continue to be important to know what biodiversity any particular action is seeking to benefit. We are also considering options to use the NBN species dictionary.

3) Importing Agri-Environment Actions:

The absence of information about the work large partner organisations are undertaking has been a significant gap impeding the current system. Chief amongst these has been the absence of biodiversity action facilitated through Agri-environment schemes. We are building an ability to import information from partner systems to fill this gap. Our initial focus will be on those systems used by Natural England, Countryside Council for Wales, and the Environment Agency. These will be used to pilot development, but once tested we intend the import facility to be available for others to use.

BARS Post April 2011

If all goes to plan BARS will be a very different beast in time for UK BAP reporting expected about this time next year. The focus of development this year is to introduce the foundations of a flexible and powerful system more able to report information on what we collectively, the UK biodiversity partnership, are doing to benefit UK biodiversity.

JNCC Hosting BARS

Although Natural England continue to oversee the BARS programme and frontline user support on, technical hosting and maintenance of the system is now handled by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). The BARS team are very pleased to be working closely with Ulric Wilson and Anton Le Mercier at JNCC. This small team is working closely with Natural England to maintain the current BARS, although much of their time will be prioritised towards new development this financial year.

BARS Maintenance

Thank you for continuing to report website bugs and request the addition of items or functionality via the “contact us” link on the website. This year we have to strike the right balance between the amount of resource we invest in maintaining the current website and that we invest in development of the new version. We believe that the new version of BARS will resolve a good number of the frustrations and suggestions fed to us. Below is a summary of tasks that will be or have already been resolved as part of maintenance of the current system:

Species Names: We have added an additional 500 species to the list of names held in the current version of BARS.

Updates / corrections to text: A number of corrections are to be made to text throughout the site.

Administrative Boundary Changes: A number of users have reported administrative boundary and name changes. Unfortunately there is little we can do to meaningfully represent these changes in the current version of BARS. Sites are managed as lists and in most cases actions are associated with the site name rather than an actual geographic location. As such there is currently no way to quickly ascertain which actions fall within the new boundaries. We hope to be able to resolve these boundary issues more effectively in the new version of BARS. This will be more spatially capable and better enable users to represent the location of actions against various and/or changing boundaries.

ReCaptcha Verification Tool: A good number of you have reported difficulties in using the ReCaptcha tool for verifying submissions to the helpdesk via “contact us”. We did find a technical issue with the way it was implemented and this has now been fixed. Even when tools like this are working they can be awkward to use, so below is a short guide on successful use:



Using the 'ReCaptcha' tool on the Contact screen

The BARS 'Contact' page contains a 'ReCaptcha' verification tool. Such tools are widely used to confirm that a person is completing the form and not an automated computer programme. Importantly for BARS it protects our contact mailbox from spam email messages.

At the bottom of the Contact BARS page users are asked to verify an image using the ReCaptcha tool. Several users have reported difficulties with interpreting and entering characters successfully.

An implementation error was discovered in June, but quickly rectified to ensure the tool works as intended. However, by way of their design the images generated are distorted and often difficult to read. If you find the image presented too vague there is an option to generate an alternative image. There is also an option to hear a set of words to enter instead. Below is quick guide that we hope will help you use the tool successfully,

A quick guide to using ReCaptcha:

1. Please enter the words you see in the image, separated by a space and in the correct order.
2. If you are not sure what the words are, either click the reload button  next to the distorted words or submit your best guess and if incorrect you will be presented with an alternative image.
3. You can click the reload button for alternative images until you see some that you can read easily.
4. Visually impaired users can click the audio button  to hear a set of words to enter instead of the visual challenge.

Please complete the image verification *



Please complete the image verification *



BARS Training Update

We plan to run a limited number of training events for the current BARS over the next four months. They will be train-the-trainer style events focussed on training a small group of people to themselves help others use the current system.

Staff change and absence has impacted our capacity to provide BARS training courses so far this year. The improvements being developed this year will change the way data is entered into the system. Our primary focus will be on preparing training material in time to support the new version of BARS when it is released around April 2011.



<http://www.ukbap-reporting.org.uk/>

BARS User Helpdesk: info@ukbap-reporting.org.uk

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