Making marine life recording work

MarLIN
The Marine Life Information Network for Britain & Ireland

By Guy Baker

SCIENTISTS AND NATURAL history enthusiasts from the UK and continental Europe met in Exeter (UK) in July, 2004, to bring together collectors and custodians of records of marine life.

Entitled "Making Marine Life Recording Work," the event was held on Thursday 29th July at Exeter University and was organised by the Marine Life Information Network *(MarLIN)* – an initiative of the Marine Biological Association (MBA) – together with the UK National Biodiversity Network (NBN). Around 60 delegates attended, including volunteer recorders and representatives from a range of marine life societies and trusts, local record centres and statutory nature conservation agencies.

Warming seas, invasions of non-native species and the impacts of human activities are all affecting our rich marine heritage. Scientists need the expertise of amateur recorders to provide information on which marine species occur where, and how their distribution is changing. In return for their efforts, volunteers need to know that the records they supply are handled and disseminated efficiently and put to use for conservation purposes. Keith Hiscock, *MarLIN's* Programme Director, said: "The seas around Britain and Ireland are changing, and scientists need to harness the expertise and enthusiasm of amateur naturalists. This conference is an excellent opportunity for volunteer recorders and data custodians to meet and work more closely together for the benefit of the marine environment."

In addition to sharing their experiences of collecting and handling data, delegates at the conference found out what had been going on within other recording organisations and took the opportunity to put faces to names of people they had communicated with by 'phone or email. It was clear that delegates valued networking opportunities and that more time for discussion 'on the sidelines' would be welcome at future events. The workshops were considered useful (and judging by the noise, enjoyable) but delegates wanted to see outcomes identified and fully disseminated.

Delegates at the *MarLIN* workshop in Exeter, England, in July 2004.

In the report on the meeting, *MarLIN* has offered to chair a virtual forum, accessible to all online, to maintain communication and awareness of what is happening within the marine recording community. This forum will foster cooperation at the regional level and encourage marine recording nationally, especially in areas of poor coverage. Other outcomes included the recommendation to standardise database software. This would eliminate problems such as duplication of records. It was also suggested that transparency in data-handling would be improved through data-sharing agreements.

The event brought together many groups and individuals and dealt with common issues. It will help to ensure that the marine life recording community is working together.

Sponsors

MarLIN would like to acknowledge the generous support for the conference given by the UK National Biodiversity Network, The Crown Estate, British Marine Aggregates Producers Association (BMAPA) and English Nature.

Presentations given at the conference are available online at www.marlin.ac.uk/conference/.

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Keith Hiscock, Programme Director, *MarLIN*

Common mussel *(Mytilis edulis).*

Keith Hiscock, Programme Director, *MarLIN*

Oarweed *(Laminaria digitata).*

Marine Biological Association

The Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom (MBA) (www.mba.ac.uk) is a professional body for marine biologists with some 1,200 members worldwide. The MBA has earned an international reputation for excellence and innovation in research, by the resident scientific staff and visiting research workers, including seven Nobel laureates.

The MBA is a founder member of the Plymouth Marine Sciences Partnership, which also includes the Sir Alister Hardy Foundation for Ocean Science (SAHFOS), the National Marine Aquarium, the University of Plymouth and the Plymouth Marine Laboratory.

The charitable aims of the Association are: "To promote scientific research into all aspects of life in the sea, including the environment on which it depends, and to disseminate to the public the knowledge gained."

For more information on the MBA's Marine Life Information Network *(MarLIN)*, look at the website (www.marlin.ac.uk).

Images

Images of marine life can be obtained from the *MarLIN* Communications and Outreach Officer, Guy Baker (g.baker@mba.ac.uk; 0044 1752 633 336). Photographic images on the website are copyright. Please do not use without consultation with *MarLIN* staff. ●

Guy Baker, Communications and Outreach Officer, *MarLIN* network for Britain and Ireland.
Tel: 0044 1752 633336
Fax: 0044 1752 633102
Web: http://www.marlin.ac.uk

Nat'l Biodiversity Network

The National Biodiversity Network (NBN) is a new and innovative way of sharing wildlife information in the UK, and is building tools to make this information accessible in a digitised and exchangeable form. By providing easy access to the information that people need about wildlife, wise and informed decisions can be made to ensure our natural environment is diverse, rich and sustainable now and for future generations.

English Nature

English Nature is the UK Government's independent agency that champions the conservation of wildlife and geology throughout England.

BMAPA

The British Marine Aggregate Producers Association represents eight companies involved in the extraction of sand and gravel from the sea-bed around the UK.

The Crown Estate

The Crown Estate, as owner of over half the UK's foreshore and almost all the seabed out to the 12-nautical-mile territorial limit, was pleased to sponsor the conference on volunteer marine life recording through its Marine Stewardship Programme. The Crown Estate operates in adherence to its core values of commercialism, integrity and stewardship.

The Crown Estate's Marine Stewardship Programme makes funds available for a range of practical projects at the coast. All projects funded through the programme are directly relevant to improving the management and stewardship of the Marine Estates. Projects currently receiving funding range from beach-cleaning initiatives to marine archaeological surveys and access improvements.

Further information about The Crown Estate can be found at www.thecrownestate.co.uk.

HERMES

By Phil Weaver

THE EU HAS RECENTLY FUNDED an Integrated Project called HERMES (Hotspot Ecosystem Research on the Margins of European Seas), which will begin on April 1st 2005 and run for four years.

HERMES is designed to gain new insights into the biodiversity, structure, function and dynamics of ecosystems along Europe's deep-ocean margin. It represents the first major attempt to understand European deep-water ecosystems and their environment in an integrated way, by bringing together expertise in biodiversity, geology, sedimentology, physical oceanography, microbiology and biogeochemistry so that the generic relationship between biodiversity and ecosystem functioning can be understood.

The primary ecosystems that we plan to study include biodiversity hotspots such as cold seeps, cold-water coral mounds, canyons and anoxic environments, where the geosphere and hydrosphere influence the biosphere through escape of fluids, presence of gas hydrates and deep-water currents. We will also study open slopes where landslides and deep-ocean circulation affect ecosystem development. These important systems require urgent study because of their possible biological fragility, unique genetic resources, global relevance to carbon cycling and possible susceptibility to global change and man-made disturbances.

Past changes, including catastrophic events, will be assessed using sediment archives. HERMES will make estimates of the flow rates of methane from the geosphere and calculate how much is utilised by benthic communities, leaving the residual contribution to enter the water column and possibly reach the atmosphere as a greenhouse gas.

HERMES will enable forecasting of biodiversity change in relation to natural and man-made environmental changes by developing the first pan-European margin Geographic Information System. This will provide a framework for integrating science, environmental modelling and socio-economic indicators in ecosystem management. The results will underpin the development of a European Ocean and Seas Integrated Governance Policy, enabling risk assessment, management, conservation and rehabilitation options for margin ecosystems.