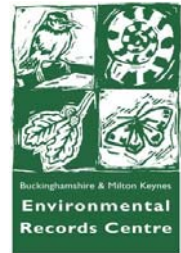


Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre – Annual report for 2008-09



<i>version</i>	<i>date</i>	<i>author</i>	<i>comments</i>
Draft 1	13 March 2009	GDB	
Draft 2	20 March 2009	GDB	Comments, updates, etc. from Laura Fennell
Draft 3	25 March 2009	GDB	Comments and updates from Martin Harvey and Sarah Gray
Final Version	27 March 2009	GDB	Comments, updates, etc. from Laura Fennell



Background

Buckinghamshire County Museum has hosted an environmental records centre since the 1970s, now known as the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre (BMERC). This grew from the Museum's long involvement with the curation of natural history specimens and related documentation. The physical collections continue to be maintained and developed, and are widely used as a research, educational and archival resource. BMERC builds on this by providing a service to collate, manage and disseminate data about wildlife, habitats and geology. Most of these data are now held electronically, making them easily accessible for a wide range of users.

BMERC is a partnership between Buckinghamshire County Council, Milton Keynes Council and Natural England. It also has Service Level Agreements with the planning authorities in Wycombe, South Buckinghamshire and Aylesbury Vale District Councils, and with the Environment Agency and British Waterways.

Aims of BMERC

BMERC aims to provide well-maintained, comprehensive, secure data on the biodiversity and geodiversity of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. We will:

- Collate data, from as many sources as possible, on wildlife and geology in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes
- Manage these data effectively and efficiently
- Ensure the data are available to all who need it
- Disseminate the data widely to enthuse and inspire people to care for their environment
- Ensure that data are available to decision-makers who need to assess the impact of decisions on the environment
- Continue to support volunteer recorders in the county, helping them to build capacity and reach new audiences

Staff and volunteers

2008-09 has been a demanding year for the Records Centre, as Martin Harvey resigned from his role as full-time Records Centre manager, taking on a new job elsewhere in the county. He still provides a half day per week of his time for BMERC. Two recruitment exercises to the Records Centre manager post were undertaken during the year, both failing to find a suitably qualified candidate. In response to this, and given the support provided by Natural England under a Memorandum of Agreement (see below), a review of the organisational structure within the Records Centre has been undertaken. This has led to the proposal to increase the staffing complement to a Records Centre Manager, a Data Management Officer and an Environmental Records Assistant. Recruitment to these posts is currently underway.

Our Environmental Records Assistant, Laura Fennell, has taken on responsibility for the bulk of the day-to-day running of the Records Centre, as well as data management issues, information enquiries and the distribution of data to Service Level Agreement partners. Laura continues to receive an honorarium in recognition of her increased responsibilities. The results of the records management and data enquiry work are highlighted in the charts below.

The Records Centre has employed two part-time casual employees (Helen Hyre and Caroline Yeo) during this financial year to assist with records entry onto the database.

The Environmental Records Officer is line-managed by Buckinghamshire County Council's Museum Manager and Curator (Sarah Gray). BMERC continues to work closely with the Museum's Natural History Curator (Mike Palmer) on many projects, especially events and activities aimed at engaging the wider public with wildlife and recording.

We are very grateful to the many volunteers who provide us with information, either directly or via the various species groups in the county. Several of the county wildlife recorders have helped us with record validation; we're grateful to all, and especially to Roy Maycock (BSBI county plant recorder) who has generously provided his expertise throughout the year. Thanks also to a number of office-based volunteers during the year, who have helped with various data management tasks, particularly Mick and Jan Wells who have been processing county mammal records (see below).

Support from Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre

TVERC has been providing support to BMERC during the last four months as part of a contract between the two parties. The support has taken the form of a one-day-per-week presence of a member of staff (Gavin Bird) at the Halton site, as well as project-specific tasks carried out by TVERC staff in Oxfordshire. The priority areas of work have been:

- the development of job description reviews of the new and existing posts,
- liaison with service level agreement partners on output delivery,
- exploring technical issues on the future data transfer from the BMERC species database (MapMate) to the NBN Gateway,
- the local wildlife sites system review.

This support was initially for a period to the end of the current financial year but has now been extended to July 2009, by which time recruitment to the new BMERC staff structure should be finalised.

Finances

BMERC's main funding in recent years has come from Buckinghamshire County Council (via the County Museum, part of the council's Culture and Learning Service) and Milton Keynes Council. Service Level Agreements are in place with three District Councils in Buckinghamshire, the Environment Agency and British Waterways, see table below. Natural England support of BMERC and other Records Centres through Memoranda of Agreement is worthy of special mention – the £15k per annum support has been of considerable benefit this year, whilst news of continued support in 2009/10 and 2010/11 is of immense importance in the mid- to longer-term planning for BMERC's future.

BMERC provides a free enquiry response service to members of the public, students/researchers and conservation organisations. We also provide an enquiry response service to developers and their consultants, and in this case we make a charge to cover the time spent in preparing reports. This is a minimum charge of £60 + VAT to cover the first hour's worth of work, and the majority of our reports are completed within an hour (typically this will provide information on protected sites, habitats and species within a 2km radius of a proposed development).

The Steering Group should note that the intention is to raise the charging rates from £60 to £75 per hour, and from £220 to £240 per day for contracted work. This is a reflection of the hold which has been placed on these rates in recent years. It also brings BMERC into line with planned increases by TVERC in neighbouring counties.

In 2008-09 the total budget for BMERC was around **£70,000** (not including office costs, which are provided by the County Museum). Expenditure was mostly taken up by staffing costs and professional fees – expenditure on the support service provided by TVERC - with small amounts going to pay for books, software and equipment, plus small grants to volunteer recording groups.

The Records Centre was able to purchase a number of GPS and Longworth small mammal traps. These will be available to local recording groups and individuals on loan to assist with improved recording effort in the county.

Income:

Funder	Type of funding	Approx. amount in 2008-09
Buckinghamshire County Council	Core funding	£28,000
Milton Keynes Council	Core funding	£13,000
Wycombe District Council	SLA (data plus enquiry response)	£3,000
South Bucks District Council	SLA (data only)	£400
Aylesbury Vale District Council	SLA (data only)	£400
Natural England	MoA (data only)	£15,000
Environment Agency	SLA (data plus enquiry response)	£5,000
British Waterways	SLA (data only)	£400
Commercial enquiries and project work	Cost of service provided	£8,000
Total		£73,200

TO BE CONFIRMED

Expenditure:

Type	Approx. amount in 2008-09
Staff salaries	£39,600
Recruitment costs	£2,870
Staff training	£175
Staff expenses	£787
Contractor costs	£14,600
Software, books, equipment	£1,750
Grants to voluntary groups	£225

TO BE CONFIRMED

Work carried out in 2008-09

In addition to the routine work of managing data and answering enquiries (see performance indicators, below), tasks completed by BMERC during 2008/09 included the following.

- ❖ *Partnership development:*
 - Renewal of SLA with partners achieved in 2008/09 and a commitment of continued support into 2009/10 broadly confirmed.
 - Continued commitment by Natural England to a Memorandum of Agreement into 2009/10 and 2010/11, at the same level of financial support
 - Second meeting of the BMERC Steering Group

- ❖ *Sites:*
 - Completion of species criteria development as part of the new, three counties Local Wildlife Sites system criteria
 - Progress towards finalising a database of sites surveyed by Bucks CC, primarily through the County Wildlife Sites and the Biological Notification Sites systems
 - In partnership with the Bucks Earth Heritage Group, a review of the Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (RIGS) in the county with a subsequent site selection panel meeting
 - Provision of support to the Bucks CC Wildlife Sites Project Officer at a site selection panel meeting, specifically in documentation of decision-making
 - Continued improvements in the management of hard copy and electronic filing of County Wildlife Site documentation

- ❖ *Species:*
 - Approximately 75,000 species records have been added to the BMERC database, despite staff shortages issues during the year
 - Another data drop was made by the Bucks Bird Club of their annual dataset
 - Two casual part-time staff have been helping to mobilise a backlog of records which date back over the last 10 years
 - Records from the county moth recorder and from Butterfly Conservation have been partially processed, with a view to incorporating into the BMERC database in mid-2009

- ❖ *Habitats:*
 - Provision of priority habitat mapping (generated by Bucks CC Natural Environment Team) to TVERC as part of the priority habitats regional dataset contract and also under conditions of the Environment Agency SLA

- ❖ *Providing information:*
 - Close to 300 data enquiries have been handled during the year. This is a drop from the previous year, mainly by virtue of species identification requests being removed from the figures
 - Information was again provided to some of the Bucks local authorities on the biodiversity indicators within the Annual Monitoring Report of the Local Development Framework

❖ *Other data management:*

- The cataloguing of hard copy reports and paper material ("grey literature") held at BMERC in a database has now been completed.
- Issues of synching copies of the MapMate database between the office PCs have now largely been overcome, despite hardware difficulties during the year
- A refreshing of the two BMERC PCs has been instigated with Bucks CC IT team, which should see us take receipt of faster processing machines early in 2009/10

❖ *Working with volunteers and the public:*

- Training on data management and inputting has been provided to Mick and Jan Wells to assist with their handling of county mammal records
- BMERC continues to directly support the Buckinghamshire Invertebrate Group (volunteer recording group) and Buckinghamshire Earth Heritage Group (both of these are done jointly with the Museum Natural History Curator, Mike Palmer), and liaise with other volunteer recorders in the county.
- A successful Wildlife Recorders' Seminar was held in April 2008, and arrangements are in place for the next event in late-April 2009.
- A number of small grants awards were made to recording groups and individuals
- A number of GPS, small mammal traps and display screens were purchased, with a view to loaning to recorders.

❖ *Other projects:*

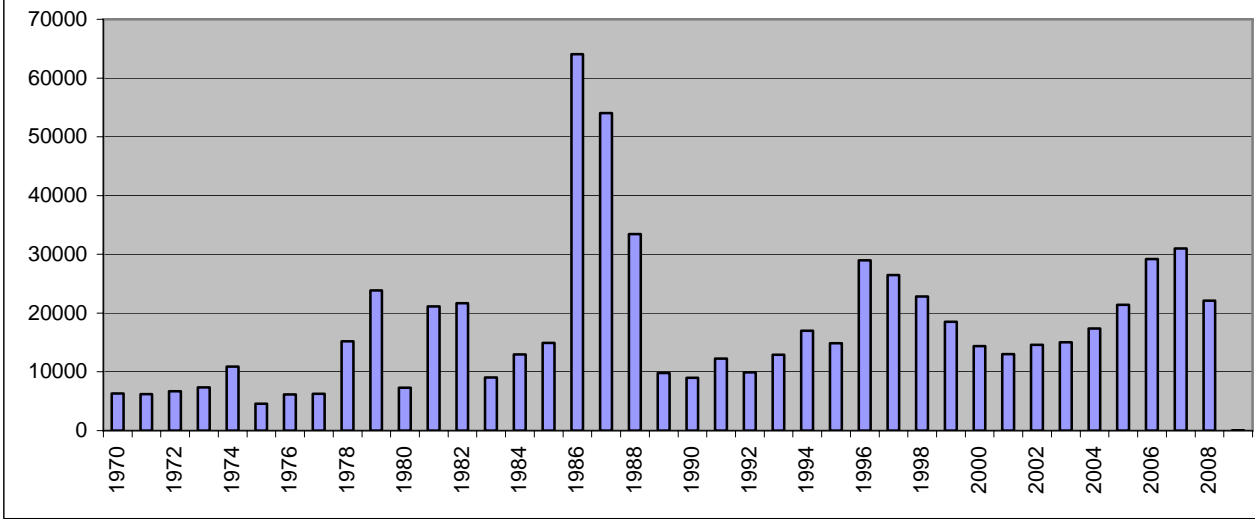
❖ *Liaison:*

- A BMERC representative attended regular meetings of the South-East Local Records Centres forum, to share best practice and help develop regional working.
- Regular managers' meetings have been held jointly with Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre, in order to share best practice and to develop joint projects.
- TVERC has provided Records Centre service support to BMERC during the last four months. The support will continue until the recruitment of new staff

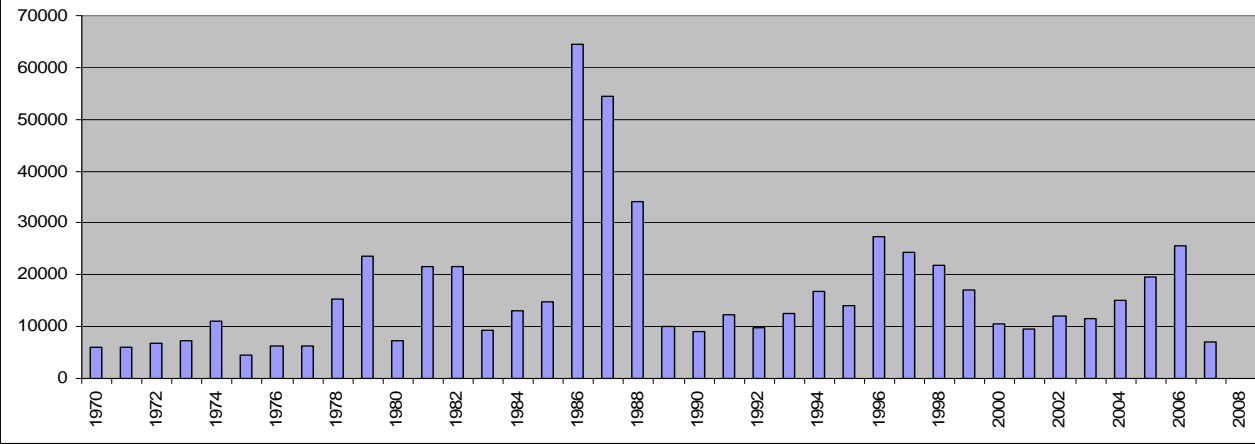
Performance indicators 2008-09

- *Species records available on database at end of 2007-08: 744,601*
- **Species records available on database at end of 2008-09: 819,749 (i.e. 75,148 added during year)**

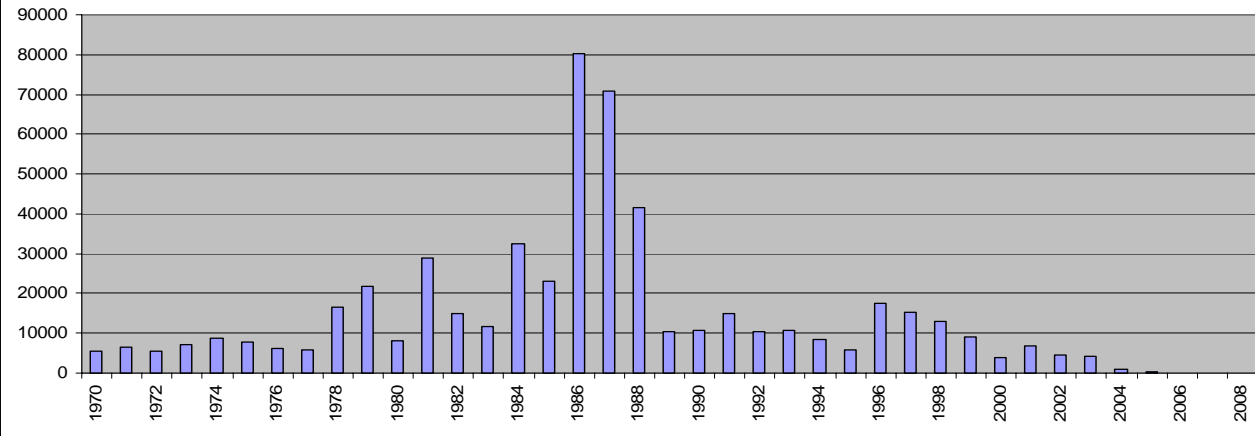
Records held at BMERC for each year, as at 17 March 2009



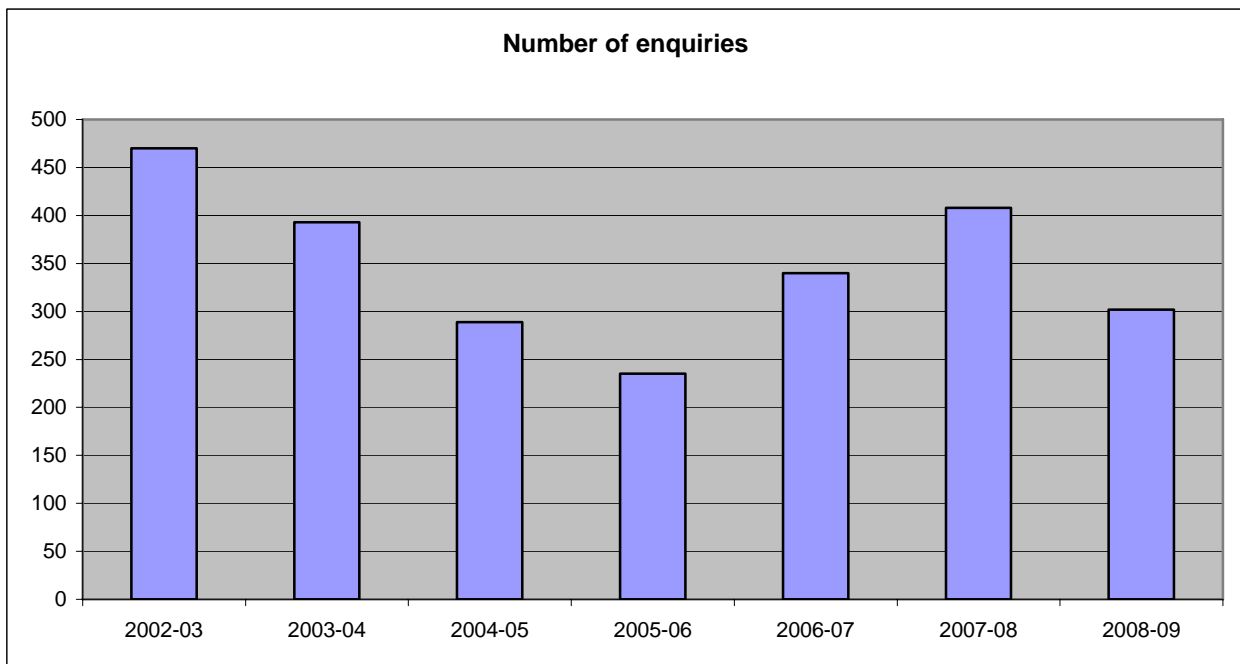
Records held at BMERC for each year, at 10 March 2008



Records held at BMERC for each year, at 21 October 2005



Data Enquiries



- Speed of response:
 - 93% of enquiries received an initial response within 3 days
 - 99% of enquiries received an initial response within 10 days
 - 99.6% of enquiries were answered within client's deadline

Enquirer categories in 2008-09:

Enquirer category	No. of enquiries	% of total
local government	100	33
developer / consultant	131	43
member of public	24	8
NGO	13	5
national government or agency	6	2
research	4	1
utility (e.g. water company)	4	1
voluntary group	16	6
business (e.g. company owning land)	0	0
media	1	0.3
school/college	2	0.7
total	301	

Appendix

Protected sites in Bucks and MK, showing international, national and local designations at March 2009

Protected species records in Bucks and MK, showing species richness per 2km-square. Data retrieved: 17 March 2009

