

Supporting Freshwater Recorders and Schemes

At a time when there is increasing concern about climate change, water scarcity and the loss of biodiversity, there is a need for detailed and accurate information on the distribution and abundance of organisms.

With this in mind, the FBA has recently appointed two part-time officers to undertake a project funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Environment Agency, supporting the voluntary study and recording of freshwater species in the UK.

Identification of organisms, promotion of, and recruitment to schemes, data management, fundraising and IT training have been highlighted by recorders as potential areas where support is required. An initial workshop for freshwater recorders was held at the Windermere site in November to determine where support can best be provided. The workshop generated some interesting debate, and a number of issues were identified.

A major concern of those recorders who attended the workshop, was the need for more people to contribute data to their scheme. Therefore, a priority of the project will be to try and encourage a greater number of people to record. It was suggested that this could be achieved through promotion and awareness raising, the production of introductory materials and courses, the development of tools which can make recording easier (such as guides on the process of recording, contact details of groups and schemes, easy offline and online data submission and web presence and publications for schemes). Another priority is to foster the community of freshwater recorders so they can share knowledge, skills and experience, and provide a common voice for fundraising and promotion.

Funding was also seen as a priority. Assistance with the completion of funding applications and the compilation of a list of funding organisations were mentioned as ways in which help could be provided. Many recorders and scheme organisers suggested that small amounts of money would be useful to aid with the purchase of equipment, travel and other expenses. The FBA will offer a dedicated Freshwater Recorders Fund to provide these small grants. The application process is currently being determined and the fund should be open to application in 2007.

A timetable of training courses is also being developed (with the first workshop on freshwater invertebrate sampling and identification scheduled at East Stoke, Dorset on the 12/13/14th February 2007, please contact us for more details). Additional courses in identification, fundraising, data management and the production of promotional materials are also planned for the future.

Given the current debate about the need to enthuse and engage the next generation in taxonomy, natural history and recording (as discussed recently by groups such as Invertebrate Link, National Federation for Biological Recording, the Yorkshire Naturalists Union and the Linnean Society), this project hopes to make a useful contribution.

If you have any suggestions for ways in which we can help, or for training courses, please contact us. spawley@freshwaterlife.org and mletcher@fba.org.uk The Ferry Landing, Far Sawrey, Ambleside, Cumbria, LA22 0LP, UK. Telephone +44 (15394) 42468 Fax: +44 (15394) 46914

All images FBA except *Scenedesmus* (Hilda Canter-Lund), *Bufo bufo* (Robert Petley-Jones), *Ranunculus penicillatus* var. *penicillatus* (Nigel Holmes)