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EuMon

EU-wide monitoring methods and systems of surveillance for species and habitats of Community interest

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RE	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission	
CO	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	

Work Package 1 contributes to the overall objectives of the EuMon project by asking how the use of amateur naturalists as unpaid volunteers, contributes to monitoring the achievement of the 2010 target of halting biodiversity loss in Europe. WP1 research is focussed on organisations engaged in monitoring activities that include data supplied through participatory networks of volunteers. We refer to these organisations as Participatory Monitoring Networks (PMNs). By examining the culture and social structure of such networks through ethnographic research during Phase II WP1 will be able to devise final recommendations on how Participatory Monitoring Networks (PMNs) can be encouraged to work most effectively.

Phase I of WP1 work attempted to identify the range and degree of coverage by PMNs across Europe. WP1 researchers searched for PMNs in all EU member states and accession countries using the Internet, advice from colleagues and contacts, existing reports, information provided by national and local government agencies and information from national NGOs associated with monitoring and nature conservation.

A questionnaire was designed and disseminated to those organisations identified as possibly being PMNs due to their engagement in conservation work or the provision of information on certain habitats or taxonomic groups. Very often it was not clear from a website whether the organisation in question is engaged in monitoring and many such organisations were contacted. A total of 2632 questionnaires (with a covering letter) were sent out and a total of 481 completed questionnaires returned by August 2005. We continue to receive completed questionnaires.

The co-ordinators of WP1 also carried out a literature search and disseminated the most relevant items to WP1 partners.

WP1 research is connected to EuMon WP2 research, which seeks to evaluate monitoring schemes from an ecological perspective in terms of their capability to assess the achievement of the 2010 target. WP2 expertise will assist in the analysis of that part of WP1 questionnaire, which asks about biodiversity monitoring methods. WP2 will also be able to make use of the results of this information together with data concerning the sources and flow of data between networks at different levels i.e. regional, national, and sub-national. The large-scale, extensive and typically volunteer-based monitoring schemes categorised and collated within the WP2 database will be negatively affected if volunteer networks cannot be sustained for the future.

The analysis of the WP1 questionnaire contributes to the work of WP2 by identifying issues such as the degree to which large or medium scale monitoring schemes are actually reliant upon volunteers, the sufficiency of volunteers, the delivery of training, and the means by which volunteers are recruited. It also asks questions about collaboration with other networks and the passing on of data.

Preliminary analysis reveals a possible trend towards a shortage of volunteers. Concerns are expressed by monitoring organisations about the viability of finding replacement volunteers, especially from within the younger generation. We expect this trend to appear more clearly in the detailed cross-tabulated analysis.

WP1 contributes to WP5 by providing a basis for recommendations on the sociological and cultural aspects of data collection schemes and patterns of information flow between data collection and analysis schemes that differ in data quality and complexity.

The following list represents a set of approaches and best practices among Participatory Monitoring Networks (PMNs) derived from a preliminary analysis of Phase I of EuMon WP1 research. These results will be confirmed and expanded by additional questionnaire returns and by the detailed cross-tabulated analysis of the questionnaire data.

The purpose of the list is to initiate a process aimed at providing final recommendations for WP5 and to feed into WP1 exchanges with WP2. Where appropriate this will also be the case for WP3 with its focus on habitats. However, PMNs tend to concentrate on collecting data on species rather than habitats. Furthermore, the list provides important signposts for the ethnographic research of WP1 Phase II. This research will focus on the in depth study of at least four selected PMNs. The ethnographic research will, in turn, enable us to refine and test the reliability of these preliminary pointers to best practice.

Preliminary List of Approaches and Best Practice in PMNs

- PMN schemes need to be underpinned by national and EU level efforts to involve citizens in monitoring and conserving biodiversity according to the 2010 target. This should involve greater publicity of the target, the role that citizens can play through PMNs, and support for training volunteers with insufficient skills. For networks to be sustainable they must be able to replace volunteers who drop out or grow too old to continue.
- Where possible PMNs should fund personnel (or find volunteers) to act as facilitators between the volunteer naturalists and the agencies that make use of data the volunteer naturalists produce. This would foster retention of volunteers by diminishing the gulf identified by other UK researchers.
- PMN organisers are most often paid professionals. They need to acknowledge the multiple ways of knowing and representing nature in order to listen, understand, and adapt to volunteers. This can be achieved by finding out more about the interests and motivations of the volunteers and catering for them. This allows for selective appropriation of some points of knowledge over others for

biodiversity policy use, but also acknowledges and values the existence of alternatives. Acknowledging the potential for more inclusive interaction between different interest groups within a PMN fosters loyalty and thwarts indifference.

- PMN leaders or managers should exercise critical self awareness as a precursor to meaningful accommodation of the knowledge/practices/motivations of volunteers. It is important to recognise the complexity of inviting citizens to become active agents in science, because different people bring different perspectives and values to the enterprise. Managers must beware of perceiving contributing citizens as mere collectors of information, or simply as nature lovers, because both categories are over simplifications. The reasons why people are prepared to donate time and energy vary enormously and are often connected to issues of personal and social identity. This is a key factor for further exploration in Phase II.
- Participants, particularly managers, should understand their network as relational, mutually constitutive, and malleable. Treating the network as if it were something static will fail to account for demographic, educational, recreational, and economic changes that alter the social contexts in which it is embedded. Participants should be committed to flexibility and show willingness to adapt to organisational change.
- It is advisable for PMNs to avoid hierarchies of expertise and try to establish a virtuous circle of expertise so that knowledge and skills circulate through the network. Such circulation encourages and enables people at all points of the network to learn from one another.
- Activities, whether organised by volunteers or paid staff, are required to support the social integration of PMNs, such as excursions, workshops, newsletters, up to date websites etc. These activities are likely to help attract new volunteers as part of the replacement needs mentioned above. PMNs almost always require more volunteers.
- PMN leaders or managers should understand how constraints within the policy domain shape volunteers' involvement – e.g. for Scotland the founding of the Scottish Environment Agency and the Nature Conservation (Scotland Act) Act 2004 may drive the current shortfall in information further up the political agenda and highlight need for trained volunteers.
- There should be transparency throughout a PMN. Volunteers should be informed about the hypothesis that the collected data is used to test. They should also be informed if data is traded or sold. UK research shows that these are important ethical concerns for volunteers who may object to their data being used in commercial transactions. In other countries i.e. The Netherlands where

volunteers may accept the sale of data if it benefits a PMN that is an NGO involved in nature conservation.

- Volunteers should be brought closer to the policy implications of their work. Volunteers may perceive the policy domain as somehow useful but distant and out of reach.
- All participants in PMNs (staff and volunteers) should understand where volunteer and professional identities and expectations intersect or coincide. This is important for volunteers to understand their role within the PMN and to connect it with their motivations and sense of identity as a volunteer. It is important for paid staff with professional credentials to understand the expectations of volunteers and also their sometimes ambiguous positions. For example a retired (or former) university professor of biology may be a significant volunteer, but expect to be treated as a professional.
- The PMN should, together with its volunteers, organise periodic training and opportunities to develop participants' knowledge and interests. PMNs should use the information gained (together with other information to which they have access) to inspire more citizens to support conservation and ecological restorations programmes.
- PMNs should encourage volunteers to participate in National Surveys where they are not already doing so (e.g. British Mammal Survey).
- It may be useful for large PMNs to co-ordinate the monitoring activities and data of smaller PMNs in order not to duplicate effort and make for better distribution of data.
- PMNs need to plan for the future by providing young people with incentives and opportunities to develop an interest in natural history and the skills required to become naturalists. Open questions on the EuMon WP1 questionnaire identify anxiety over lack of young people with the necessary interest and skills to carry out monitoring activities.
- PMNs need resources to develop learning materials and education or should be linked to pedagogical institutions.
- PMNs involved in monitoring species that are difficult to identify should involve themselves with school/college nature clubs and other relevant youth organisations. This could target young people whose expressed interest might predispose them to becoming volunteers. These activities would supplement links with curriculum activities mentioned above.