



Data Sharing with ERIC North East Frequently Asked Questions

What is ERIC North East?

The Environmental Records Information Centre (ERIC) North East works closely with wildlife recording groups and individuals to collate as much information as possible on important species, habitats and sites in the region. This data is used to inform those working in wildlife conservation, planning and the voluntary recording community when they make decisions about the environment. ERIC North East works with hard-working recorders, sourcing data which is not easily accessible and helping to digitise data to make it useable. It also aims to encourage more people to get involved with wildlife recording by raising awareness of local and regional voluntary recording groups.

ERIC North East evolved from the Exploring Your Environment (EYE) Project and is hosted in the Great North Museum: Hancock. It is governed by an independent Board, made up of a range of stakeholders including the voluntary recording community. ERIC North East still manages and runs the EYE Project website which is designed to allow the public to record their wildlife sightings across the region.

Why would we want to share data with ERIC North East?

The majority of counties and regions in Great Britain have record centres. Up until now, the North East did not have one, which proved a major problem for anyone who needed access to up-to-date data for their work, whether for biodiversity conservation, planning decisions, to inform development or for academic and voluntary research. In addition, because existing data management has been patchy, lots of data exists in a format that cannot be easily used. At the same time, many recording groups, recorders and organisations have been collating and managing some very good data. However, people who need access to data normally have to go to multiple sources, all with different systems, which is a time consuming and difficult task. As a result, they have tended to go to only one or two sources, the result of which means that the data is incomplete. **Incomplete data means that wildlife conservation decisions are being made without the full range of information.**

How would we benefit from sharing data?

Through a number of ways:

- Many recorders and recording groups manage their own database for the taxa groups they are interested in. Data sharing would be a two-way process: any relevant data from ERIC North East would also be shared with you, provided that permissions exist from the original data supplier. This would also augment your own databases and result in everyone being better informed.
- Support with usage of recording software (Recorder or MapMate) assistance with installation, basic training and basic technical support.
- Digitisation or assistance with the digitisation of paper data (including some data held within museum collections).
- Provision of distribution maps for atlases or to identify gaps.

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- Invitations to recording events: including a recorder's day in the Great North Museum, Bioblitz events, etc.
- Promotion through the website and in the Natural Northumbria Gallery in the Great North Museum: Hancock.

Of course, the most obvious benefit is that by working in partnership and sharing data, wildlife records will be much more accessible for conservation purposes. Without an up-to-date, centralised system for biodiversity data, it is impossible for anyone to know how the natural environment is changing. Limited evidence means limited money for wildlife conservation, as there is incomplete baseline data to prove that the funding is needed.

I don't want my data falling into the wrong hands. What safeguards are there to protect sensitive species and sensitive records?

The records are stored in a password-protected database called Recorder 6, which only ERIC North East staff have access to. Recorder 6 is held on a secure server managed by Newcastle City Council, and is backed up daily.

Our partners and other biodiversity professionals have helped us to develop a list of sensitive species. Records of these species are managed with particular caution, and are only passed on to bona-fide users who have a valid reason for accessing the data: for example Natural England, the Environment Agency, and the Wildlife Trusts. If necessary, we reduce the resolution of records or will contact you for your permission to pass the records on. You can use the Data Sharing Agreement to reiterate how you would like sensitive records to be managed.

How do I know that ERIC will treat my data in the way that I want?

We encourage data owners to complete a Data Sharing Agreement, which you can use to set out exactly how you would like us to manage your records, and what we can and cannot do with them. We always respect the wishes of data suppliers, and will stop using your data if you wish us to do so.

What if someone has a question about a record and doesn't know that the record belongs to me?

You will always retain ownership of your data: ERIC North East merely acts as a custodian. With your permission, your name will appear as the 'Observer' alongside each record. If we receive a query about a record which we are unable to answer, we will contact you for clarification. However, we will not pass on your contact details to anyone unless you expressly tell us to do so, for reasons of personal data protection.

What if someone wants more information or context about the raw data?

In any report that we prepare, each record has a column which lists which dataset it has come from. Although we will not automatically pass personal contact details on, if you are a specialist group or organisation, the recipient of the report will be able to contact your group or organisation for advice. ERIC North East will also signpost third parties to your group or organisation for contextual advice.

I am happy for ERIC North East to hold my data, but I want to control access to who is able to use it.

This is not a problem. As the owner of the data, you can set out who ERIC North East can or cannot grant access to. You can do this through the Data Sharing Agreement, which you complete before the data sharing process takes place. We would encourage you to trust that we will only share your data with recognised organisations and individuals, but we will respect and adhere to any regulations you place upon your data.

I'm not sure that I want any of my data to be put on the web. How can I control this?

We upload as much data as possible to the NBN Gateway. This is a national web portal run by the National Biodiversity Network, which aims to hold as much biodiversity data as possible so it can be quickly and easily accessed to understand the distribution of particular species in the UK. Individual records, covering plants, mammals, birds and invertebrates, are stored on the NBN Gateway and these can then be displayed on a map of the UK in a number of different ways. All data held by ERIC North East on the Gateway is displayed at a 1km square resolution, and sensitive species data can only be viewed at a 10km square resolution.

It is more beneficial to wildlife conservation if as much data as possible is made accessible on the Gateway. However, again, we will only upload records onto the Gateway with your permission, and you can set out your restrictions in the Data Sharing Agreement.

What format does ERIC North East store data in?

We store species records electronically, in a database developed by the JNCC called Recorder 6. We use Excel to move records in and out of this database. We also use a Geographical Information System (GIS) to store habitat data, such as maps showing the location of protected sites.

If I share data with ERIC, am I still able to share it with others?

Of course; it is entirely up to you who you share your data with. The only thing we ask is that you let us know if you share with any other recording schemes as we might receive data from them too, resulting in duplication.

How does ERIC deal with duplication of data?

Duplication is a problem we have to continuously monitor, as many different individual recorders and recording groups share their records with us. Occasionally we receive the same dataset or record more than once, from different sources. We use a variety of different strategies to identify possible areas of duplication and ensure our database is as duplication-free as possible:

- We log each survey or dataset we receive and ensure we hold metadata telling us who commissioned the survey, when, why, and who else holds a copy of it.
- We keep up regular communication with data owners and ask that they let us know if there is a possibility we will receive the records from elsewhere.
- We store datasets as separate surveys in Recorder, allowing us to easily identify if we already hold data from that provider.
- We always check for duplicates within each dataset once the records are in Excel.

What if you do not hold data for a specific site? Do you let the requesting party know that this does not necessarily mean there is no wildlife present at this site?

The data provided by ERIC North East to third parties represents the data available at the time of the request. The data provided does not necessarily represent all extant data for a given area, nor should the absence of data be interpreted as indicative of the absence of a given species or habitat. It is vitally important that a lack of records for particular sites or species on our system does not result in decisions being made on that basis.

We always ensure that third parties are aware of this, and we also recommend they contact other recording groups and societies for additional data, particularly if we do not hold copies of that group's records.

If you have any further queries or would like any more information please contact Katherine Pinnock, ERIC North East Coordinator on 0191 222 5158 or katherine.pinnock@twmuseums.org.uk.