1.1 Data Sharing and Access Policy

The Environmental Records Information Centre (ERIC) North East manages a database of wildlife records from across the North East of England.

ERIC North East aims to assimilate and improve access to biodiversity information in order to inform the management and conservation of the natural environment, as well as increasing knowledge about the natural heritage of the North East of England for multiple stakeholders. ERIC North East is managed by a Board and hosted in the Great North Museum: Hancock.

This *Data Sharing and Access Policy* outlines the procedures used by ERIC North East to ensure that data are correctly managed and made easily accessible without increasing the risk of damage to biodiversity.

Data sharing

ERIC North East receives wildlife data shared by individuals and organisations across the region, and those contributing data to the records centre are encouraged to enter into a Data Sharing Agreement. The Data Sharing Agreement explains how ERIC North East will manage and use the data whilst ensuring that the rights of the data supplier are fully recognised and supported.

There are two versions of the Data Sharing Agreement:

- *Data Sharing Agreement for Recorders* – individual recorders who are sharing their own records with ERIC North East or organisations who commission and manage their own data. (document 1.3).

- *Data Sharing Agreement for Data Collators* – individuals, groups or organisations who have collated records from a variety of sources, often into combined datasets or databases (document 1.4).

A *Dataset Information Sheet* (document 1.5) is used to collect metadata on each dataset shared with ERIC North East. This is compiled using information from the data supplier and aims to identify sensitive or confidential records contained within the dataset and prevent the duplication of records within the region by establishing if others hold copies of the data.

Data verification and validation

The verification and validation of wildlife data received by ERIC North East are essential steps in the data management process. Verification involves checking the accuracy of the identification of the species and validation checks ensure that the record has been correctly entered.

All data shared with ERIC North East are validated by staff and verified by a local recorder or a knowledgeable expert. See *Verification and Validation Procedure* (document 1.2) for more details.

This database is held in a secure location on a Newcastle City Council server and is backed up on a daily basis.

Data access

ERIC North East aims to make the data it holds easily accessible to all for the purpose of wildlife conservation and to inform future environmental planning. Data are essential to the work of the biodiversity community and baseline information must be gathered before action can be taken to conserve and enhance species and habitats.

Partners include local recorders and recording groups, the Local Nature Partnerships, the Wildlife Trusts, local authorities, ecological consultants working on behalf of a planner or developer, and regional and national bodies such as Northumbrian Water and the Environment Agency.

ERIC North East is unbiased in the supply of data though there may be some circumstances in which ERIC North East needs to restrict access to all or part of a dataset:

- If the release of certain data is likely to put sensitive species at risk. The ERIC North East *Sensitive Species List* (document 1.6) details the current list of sensitive species.

- If the release of data may jeopardise its future supply.

- If the data contains confidential information regarding recorders. ERIC North East will not make any personal information available to others that is restricted by a data sharing agreement. Typically, ERIC North East normally supplies the name of the original recorder only in order to make the record valid.

- Where permission is restricted by the data supplier.

The procedure which individuals and organisations should follow when requesting data from ERIC North East is outlined in document *Guidelines for Data Requests* (document 2.1). A charge is made to cover the administrative costs of performing a data request though this is waived for most charities, recording groups and academic users. See document *Charging Policy* (document 2.5) for more details.

Data provided by ERIC North East is made available for use in accordance with the records centre's *Terms and Conditions for Data Use* (document 2.2). This document protects the copyright of the data suppliers and explains the permissions which are attached to the use of the data.

Web access

ERIC North East adheres to the National Biodiversity Network's Data Exchange Principles.

Under Principle One, that biodiversity data should be easily accessible to enable their use for decision making, education, research and other public-benefit purposes, some data is made more accessible via the National Biodiversity Network Gateway and ERIC North East's online recording portal.

Data held by ERIC North East are submitted to the NBN Gateway (data.nbn.org.uk), providing that permission from the data supplier has been granted. All data are restricted to a public resolution of 10km² and are downloadable. If enhanced access to the data is required, users must apply directly to ERIC North East via the NBN Gateway access controls. Such requests will be assessed on a case by case basis by ERIC North East staff.

Sensitive data

ERIC North East holds a list of sensitive species which is reviewed on a regular basis. This information is contained in the ERIC North East *Sensitive Species List.* Information about species on this list is restricted only where open access would be contrary to the public interest in preserving biodiversity.

ERIC North East complies with the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998. In particular, it keeps all personal information secure from any unauthorised or accidental use, access, disclosure, damage, loss or destruction. Recorder names are normally supplied with the relevant records in data requests, but are withheld from any data which might be in the public domain. Contact details are only supplied where the recorder has given their permission for us to do so.