

Thames Valley

Environmental Records Centre



Sharing environmental information in Berkshire and Oxfordshire

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END OF YEAR REPORT

APRIL 2017 – MARCH 2018



CHAIR'S FOREWORD

Once again this year has seen a significant growth in the numbers of records held by TVERC and I can confidently predict that we will reach an important milestone of 2 million records in the coming year. Much of this success has to be down to the dedication and expertise of the small army of volunteer recorders that are at the core of everything TVERC does.

The year has been one of unprecedented change in the Counties with rates of development that haven't been seen for many years. This level of development activity is reflected in the continuing record levels of data searches from developers and their ecological consultants.

TVERC has been active in the face of this change in developing a new Biodiversity Impact Calculator to help Local Authorities to try and achieve their aim of a no net loss for biodiversity with new all developments. TVERC will be continuing work in this area to develop new data products that we hope will help to reduce the damage to biodiversity caused by development.

TVERC now faces the challenge of becoming a truly independent organisation for the first time in its history with the move to become a Community Interest Company and the physical separation from Oxfordshire County Council. The difficulty of making this change should not be underestimated and I know it has placed a great deal of pressure on Camilla and the Team. What we look forward to is the bright new future with an independent TVERC which is more agile and better placed to respond to the challenges the future holds.

Dominic Lamb MCIEEM
Countryside Officer, Planning
South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2017/18 the TVERC Steering Group decided, following a report by a solicitor, that setting up as a Community Interest Company was the best option. We will be working on this in future years.

We now hold almost 2 million records of flora and fauna in Berkshire and Oxfordshire, an increase of over 112,000 (from 387 datasets), plus information about Local Wildlife and Geological Sites, NERC Act S41 Habitats of Principal Importance (previously called UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats) and Ecological Networks (Conservation Target Areas and Biodiversity Opportunity Areas).

We increased our income from new customers and developed new services, including data analysis for Chilterns AONB, identifying green corridors for Neighbourhood Planning groups, and providing summarised data on designated sites, priority habitats and priority species on all National Trust sites in South East England. We also developed a Biodiversity Impact Assessment Calculator to allow assessment of 'no net loss' on planning applications and a Bat Alert Map.

In 2017-18, we had six Oxford University students doing research on green spaces, weather data and pollinator resources, three Reading University students looking at adder distributions, the value of gardens for biodiversity and habitat creation/restoration and one student from Sparsholt College analysing fish and water quality data.

We carried out a total of 61 LWS surveys in 2017/18. Thanks to the help of our volunteers, specialist species group surveys were completed on several sites for birds, invertebrates and rare plants. Survey reports were produced and taken to the site selection panel. TVERC also carried out a major review and update of the LWS selection criteria. The updated criteria was used in the selection panels at the beginning of 2018.

TVERC carried out 801 data searches in 2017/18. This was about the same as the previous year when we carried out 800 data searches. We provided the usual GIS updates to our funding partners on species, sites and habitats.

Our Recording Coordinator post (previously called Volunteer Coordinator) has been made permanent and we have updated our website to clarify the services available to volunteer recorders. We also funded three projects under our Recorders Grant Scheme, and lent equipment out to three other groups. We organised two Recording Conferences and training courses on hedgerows, invertebrates and otters as well as some informal 'recording days' for recorders to practice their skills and share knowledge with each other.

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Rachael Clemson left as our Data Assistant to take up a similar post with Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre, and be closer to her family. Katherine Lister started in this role in August 2017. Caroline Coleman also left, to take up a post with BBOWT. So a second addition to our team is our new Biological Records Co-ordinator, Zoe Caals. We also rely on help from volunteers to manage and input data into our database. In 2017/18, eighteen office volunteers carried out 126 days of data management.

We ended 2017-18 with a net underspend of £39.4k, which leaves TVERC in a strong position to continue to invest in improving our service, ensuring we are resilient to change and allowing us to move forwards with plans to become independent of OxonCC.

Camilla Burrow, MCIEEM

TVERC Director

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VISION

MISSION STATEMENT

TVERC is the only organization in Berkshire and Oxfordshire providing a comprehensive ecological information hub through which critical knowledge can be shared to support scientific research and responsible decision-making.

TVERC is at the centre of a network of recorders and data-users in Berkshire and Oxfordshire and is the regional delivery node of the National Biodiversity Network.



TVERC is a not-for-profit organisation run by a partnership. All those contributing to TVERC help manage our environmental resources sustainably for current and future use.

WHAT IS A LERC?



Local Environmental Record Centres are *“Not-for-profit organisations that collect, collate and manage information on the natural environment for a defined geographic area. LERCs support and collaborate with a network of experts to ensure information is robust, and make information products and services accessible to a range of audiences including decision-makers, the public, and researchers”*

Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC)

Data 	We collect wildlife information from a wide variety of sources in a coordinated way; enabling information-sharing between recorders and decision-makers.
Information 	We are a specialist team with the skills, knowledge and dedication to make complex data understandable and available to all who need it.
Knowledge	This constantly improving, high quality resource is accessible by everyone so they have the knowledge they need to carry out scientific research and make responsible decisions.



VISION

TVERC is an independent source of high quality comprehensive environmental information. Our broad customer base means we are financially sustainable and are able to provide strong evidence for environmental issues into the next generation.

TVERC is a leader in its field known for its creative solutions in interpreting the natural environment for a broad range of organisations and individuals who understand and value the work we do. Research and innovation as a result of collaboration drive our development so that we are a respected partner in providing an evidence base for policy.

TVERC is at the centre of a network of recorders and users providing valued support as part of a partnership and engages with a future generation of recorders.

Our team maintains strong connections with volunteers, recorders and partners. Together, we have the skills, expertise and knowledge to promote the recognition and value of local data in decision-making at all levels.

Our environment is better as a result of decisions made using our data and information.

GOALS

Working towards and ultimately achieving the following goals will ensure we achieve our future vision for TVERC.

1. Be independent
2. Maintain and continue to expand a database of high quality comprehensive environmental information
3. Maintain and engage with a broad customer base
4. Develop and offer creative solutions to interpret natural environment data.
5. Collaborate or lead on research and innovation to drive our development
6. Be a respected partner in providing evidence base for policies.
7. Remain at the centre of a network of recorders
8. Provide valued support to, and engagement with, current and future recorders and partners.
9. Employ valued and respected staff who retain and develop their skills, expertise and knowledge.
10. We live in a better environment in Berks and Oxon as a result of decisions made using our data and information.



1. BE INDEPENDENT

In 2017/18 the TVERC Steering Group decided, following a report by a solicitor, that setting up as a Community Interest Company was the best option. We will be pursuing this in future, whilst ensuring we continue to meet our vision to support recorders and enable decision-making.

2. HOLD A DATABASE OF HIGH QUALITY COMPREHENSIVE ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION

We hold almost 2 million records of flora and fauna in Berkshire and Oxfordshire plus information about Local Wildlife and Geological Sites, NERC Act S41 Habitats of Principal Importance (previously called UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats) and Ecological Networks (Conservation Target Areas and Biodiversity Opportunity Areas).

We collect data from the general public, skilled volunteer/amateur recorders, professionals working for wildlife charities (BBOWT and RSPB), professionals working for government agencies (Natural England, the Environment Agency & local authorities) and ecological consultants. The cost to TVERC to collect, check and process data is about 25p per record, which means we prioritise datasets which are recent and include protected & notable species for data management.

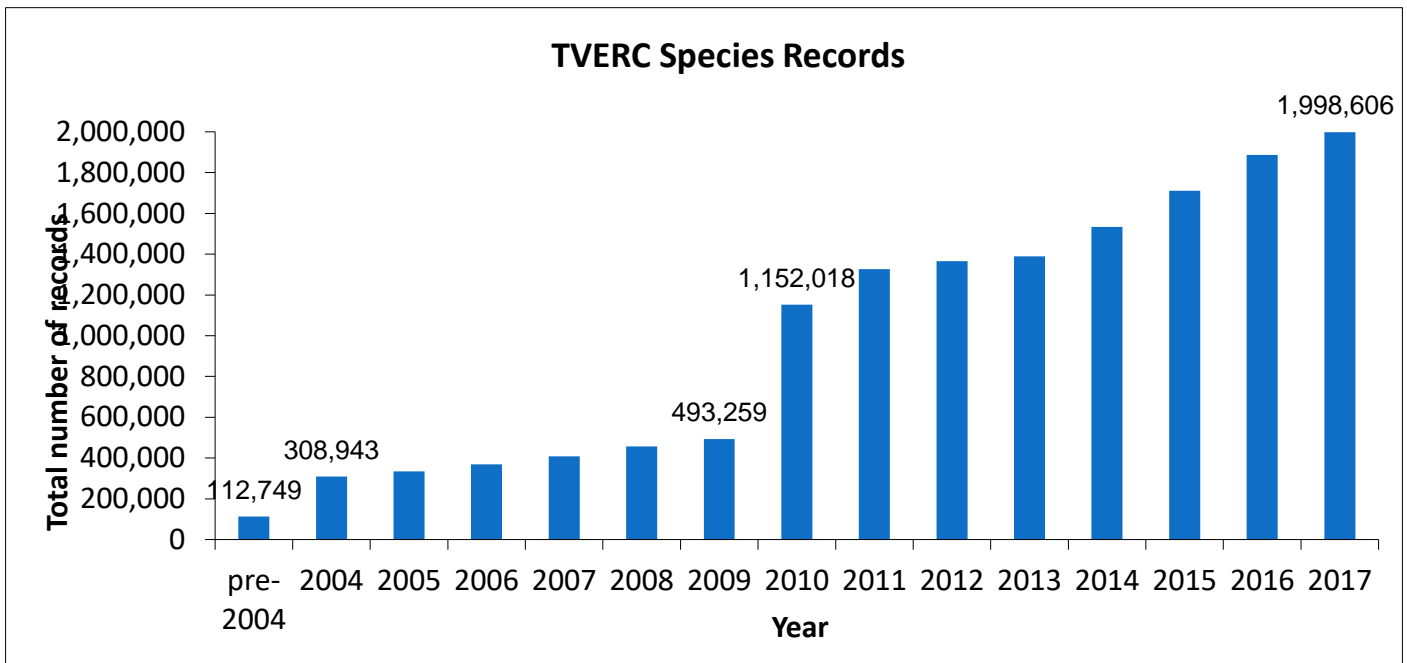
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SPECIES RECORDS

We added 112,084 new records to our database in 2017. Our database now includes almost 2 million records.

Year	Records added	Total number of records
pre-2004	112,749	112,749
2004	196,194	308,943
2005	24,949	333,892
2006	35,633	369,525
2007	38,497	408,022
2008	48,585	456,607
2009	36,652	493,259
2010	658,759	1,152,018
2011	174,389	1,326,407
2012	39,413	1,365,820
2013	23,503	1,389,323
2014	144,796	1,534,119
2015	177,549	1,711,668
2016	174,854	1,886,522
2017	112,084	1,998,606



DATASETS

458 datasets were acquired by TVERC from individual recorders, recording groups, conservation organizations and environmental consultants and from local authorities either direct or via planning portals during the financial year 2017/18. In 2017/18 we concentrated particularly on collecting both positive and negative records of great crested newts and bats because these are essential for data modelling. These are processed and added to our database in accordance with our Data Policies & Procedures document. The percentage of high priority data sets imported or otherwise processed within the same financial year was 81%. This compares with 54% received and dealt with in the previous financial year. We added 387 new datasets and 162,864 individual records into Recorder, plus Local Wildlife Site species data for the two counties. The largest data sets dealt with during this period were 25,000 records from John Campbell (pre-2012), 17,900 invertebrate records from Richard Comont and 15,600 EA fish count records (open access). 2017/18 saw the Recorder database exceed 2 million records.



DATA AGREEMENTS

Each year, TVERC negotiate with the wide range of recorders and recording groups in Berkshire and Oxfordshire to ensure we can access new data.

New data agreements:

- Roger Frankum (Hungerford Birds) – August 2017
- Oxfordshire Badger Group – October 2017
- Silwood Park Herpetological Society – October 2017
- Wild Oxfordshire – January 2018

Renewed/amended data agreements:

- Binfield Badger Group – renewed October 2017
- Berkshire Ornithological Club – amended December 2017

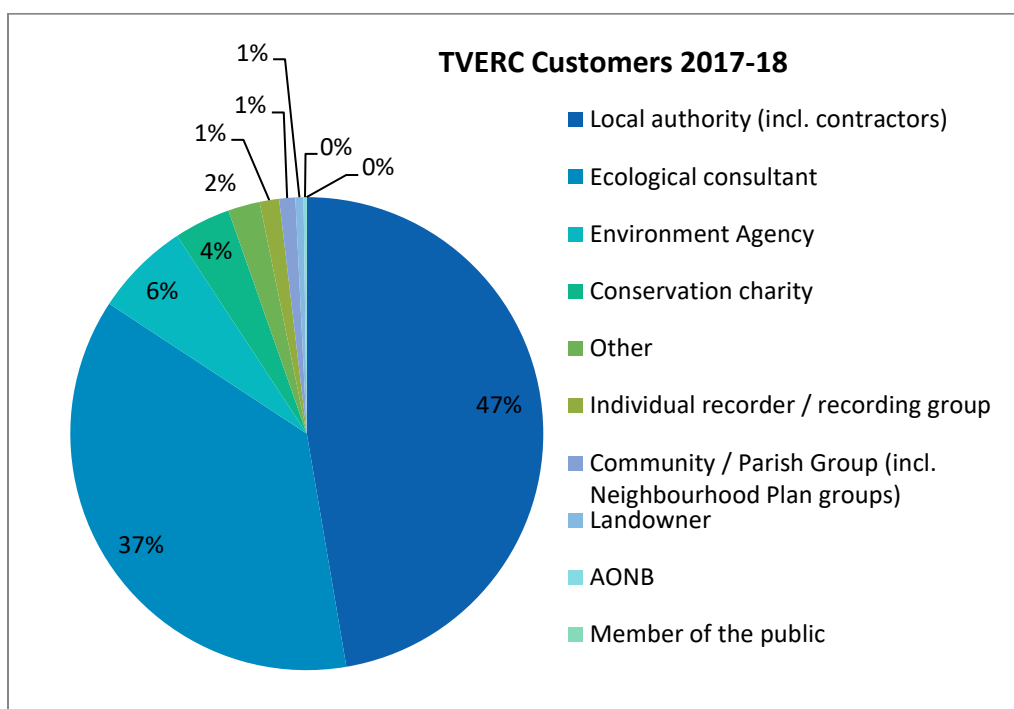
Groups which supplied TVERC with data:

- Abingdon Naturalists' Society
- Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire
- Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust
- Oxfordshire Amphibian and Reptile Group
- BBOWT
- British Dragonfly Society (Berkshire)
- Besselsleigh Wood Group
- Bracknell Forest Veteran Tree Association
- Banbury Ornithological Society
- BSBI
- Earth Trust
- Earthworm Society
- Fungus Survey of Oxfordshire
- Hants & IoW Wildlife Trust
- International Otter Survival Fund
- Moor Green Lakes Group
- Oxfordshire Bat Group
- Oxfordshire Flora Group
- Oxford Ornithological Society
- Pang Valley Countryside Project
- RSPB
- Sandford-on-Thames Neighbourhood Plan
- Weevil & Bark Beetle Recording Scheme
- Wychwood Flora Group

3. ENGAGE WITH A BROAD CUSTOMER BASE

Our data are used by a diverse customer base, but within this, TVERC is currently reliant on a small number of customers for the majority of our income. We are seeking to diversify our income stream by increasing income from other sectors such as community groups, conservation NGOs, university researchers, land management advisors and Parish & Town Councils. In 2017/18 we secured income from some new customers (see table below) and we hope to continue this in 2018/19.

TVERC Customers	Amount 2016/17	Amount 2017/18	Increase / decrease
Local authority (incl. contractors)	£171,181	£155,314	↓ -9%
Ecological consultant	£91,370	£121,230	↑ +33%
Environment Agency	£17,280	£21,330	↑ +23%
Conservation charity	£1,050	£12,678	↑ +1107%
Other	£8,448	£7,138	↓ -16%
Individual recorder / recording group	£3,267	£4,375	↑ +34%
Community / Parish Group	£950	£3,593	↑ +248%
Landowner	£3,170	£1,830	↓ -42%
AONB	£0	£642	↑ +642%
Member of the public	£390	£75	↓ - 81%
TOTAL	£297,106	£328,205	↑ +10%



4. USE CREATIVE SOLUTIONS TO INTERPRET NATURAL ENVIRONMENT DATA

NEW PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

In 2017-18 we developed several new products and services and the following work was carried out.

HABITAT NETWORK MODELLING - GREEN CORRIDORS IN PARISHES

South Leigh Neighbourhood Plan group commissioned TVERC to identify green corridors in their parish to support their neighbourhood plan.

IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT ON BIODIVERSITY

TVERC proposes to implement and administer a biodiversity accounting system for Berkshire and Oxfordshire to allow assessment of 'no net loss' on planning applications. TVERC will produce a biodiversity impact assessment calculator / metric and facilitate work to agree this between LPAs and ecologists, produce guidance for LPAs and applicants on using the calculator and implement a system for issuing certificates to applicants for impact assessment calculations. The benefits to LPAs include a system managed independently by TVERC that has no need for an increase in existing resources for LPAs. It will be a consistent system and locally relevant system that accounts for local need across the

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Thames Valley. It will provide a clear and transparent system for applicants and help to achieve ‘no net loss’ on all developments in accordance with the NPPF. Version 2.1 of the BIAC has been prepared and shared, following a peer review meeting. Natural England are currently reviewing the DEFRA metric and the results of this project will inform the next stage of TVERC's work.

READING BAT ALERT MAP

Local authority ecologists spend a significant amount of time determining whether householders putting in applications for work to roof-spaces need to submit a bat survey. Arguably, their limited time would be better spent ensuring that high quality mitigation measures were put in place where there is going to be an impact on biodiversity. So Reading Borough Council commissioned TVERC to produce a ‘bat alert’ map which can be published on the website to indicate to householders whether or not they need a bat survey. This model uses ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ records of bat roosts and TVERC's habitat data to build a habitat suitability model, and is a development of the model used by Wokingham BC. We are encouraging other local authorities to commission maps of their area, and several have shown interest.

5. COLLABORATION, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION DRIVES OUR DEVELOPMENT

We have links with Imperial College London (Silwood Park), Oxford University, Oxford Brookes University and Reading University.

STUDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

These links work well for attracting student volunteers to carry out data management and project work, particularly for the ‘Consultancy’ modules in the MSc courses run by both Reading and Oxford Brookes Universities. In 2017-18, we had six Oxford University students doing research on green spaces, weather data and pollinator resources, three Reading University students looking at adder distributions, the value of gardens for biodiversity and habitat creation/restoration and one student from Sparsholt College analysing fish and water quality data.

NATURAL CAPITAL AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

TVERC received funding from Oxfordshire County Council to scope out a method for a Natural Capital and Ecosystems Services assessment for Oxfordshire. The resulting innovative approach has been developed in collaboration with a wide range of environmental stakeholders, including Oxford University, Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, Sylva, and Trust for Oxfordshire’s Environment.



6. WE ARE A RESPECTED PARTNER IN PROVIDING AN EVIDENCE BASE FOR POLICIES.

Making policy relies on a robust evidence base. TVERC already provide trusted and scientifically robust evidence on which others base policy. We will continue to do so, as well as developing new products and services, based on sound science, that are trusted and respected by our partners and customers.

LOCAL WILDLIFE SITES

Local Wildlife Site surveys are one of the core services that TVERC continues to provide across the two counties for the majority of the Local Authorities. We carried out a total of 61 LWS surveys in 2017/18. Thanks to the help of our volunteers, specialist species group surveys were completed on several sites for birds, invertebrates and rare plants. Survey reports were produced and taken to the site selection panel. The full detail of these is in appendix I.

TVERC also carried out a major review and update of the LWS selection criteria. The updated criteria was used in the selection panels at the beginning of 2018.

OXFORDSHIRE SURVEYS

This year TVERC carried out surveys of 42 existing and proposed Local Wildlife Sites (pLWS) in Oxfordshire. Thanks to the help of our volunteers, specialist species group surveys were completed on several sites for birds, invertebrates and rare plants. Areas surveyed include parts of Chimney Meadows, a Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) reserve where additional arable reversion fields (not currently included in the SSSI or existing LWS section) are now also being considered for inclusion as an extension to the existing Local Wildlife Site. These areas include species-rich grassland with many of the species typically associated with lowland meadow such as Black Knapweed, Oxeye Daisy, Meadow Vetchling, Bird's foot trefoil, Quaking Grass, Meadowsweet and Pepper Saxifrage. In July we joined several members of the Besselsleigh Common Wood Group on a site visit where a variety of woodland plants were recorded including Wood Anemone, Hairy Brome, Wood Sedge, Bluebell, Wood Sorrel and Wood Millet. Interesting species recorded elsewhere included Bird's-foot at Lincoln Lane Fields, Wild Liquorice at Chilswell Valley and Early Purple Orchid at Stoke Wood.

BERKSHIRE SURVEYS

In 2017 a total of 19 existing and proposed Local Wildlife Sites were surveyed in Berkshire. These surveys were carried out by experienced surveyors Katherine Holmes and Helen Miller. A variety of

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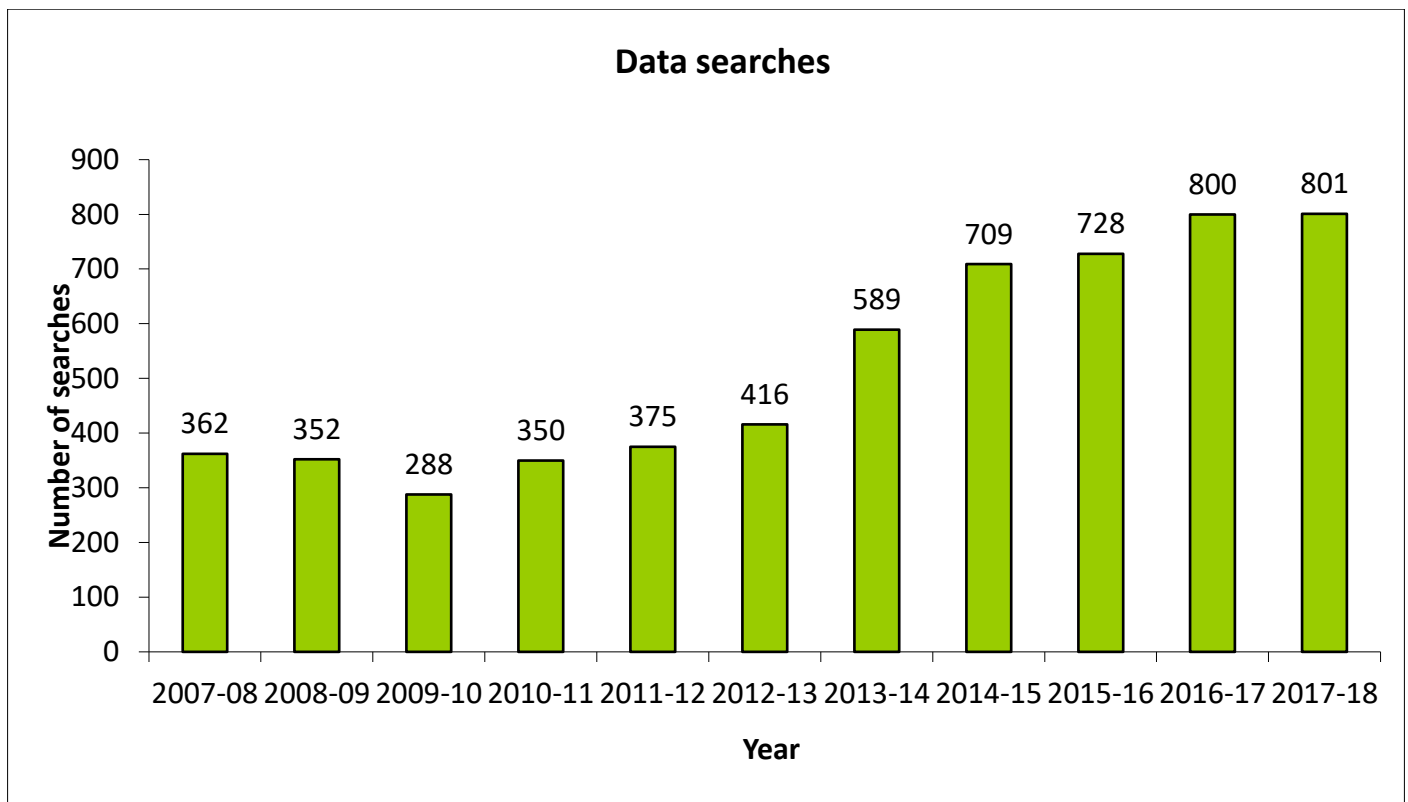
habitats were surveyed across these Berkshire sites, including woodland, heathland, fen, grassland, wetlands and ponds. Particularly interesting sites of the season included Dunkin's Copse (West Side) LWS where along with several indicators of long established woodland such as moschatel, pignut, red currant, woodruff and three-veined sandwort; a single stand of Nationally Scarce Spiked Star of Bethlehem, *Ornithogalum pyrenaicum* was found in this small remnant piece of Ancient Woodland in West Berkshire. The proposed LWS Fobney Island is a wonderful example of a successful wetland habitat restoration project. In just a few years this site has become a lovely mosaic of wetland habitats that includes: open water with marginal vegetation, swamps, grasslands, wet woodland, scrub and tall ruderal vegetation. This form of wildlife focused habitat creation and management has resulted in a provision of high valued habitats to both wildlife and people.



DATA SEARCH REQUESTS

We have continued to improve our data search processes to automate many of the tasks for extracting and supplying data. We are now spending less time on these tasks, which leaves more time for collating, checking and importing data. We have been preparing for the move to a simpler charging structure for the most commonly requested data searches which won't require a quote to be issued by TVERC and signed by the requestor which should save even more time and allow requestors to instantly see the cost of their search report. The new online form will also allow us to add more options for requestors for additional datasets (e.g. SSSI risk zones and Ancient Woodland Inventory sites).

TVERC carried out 801 data searches in 2017/18. This was about the same as the previous year when we carried out 800 data searches.



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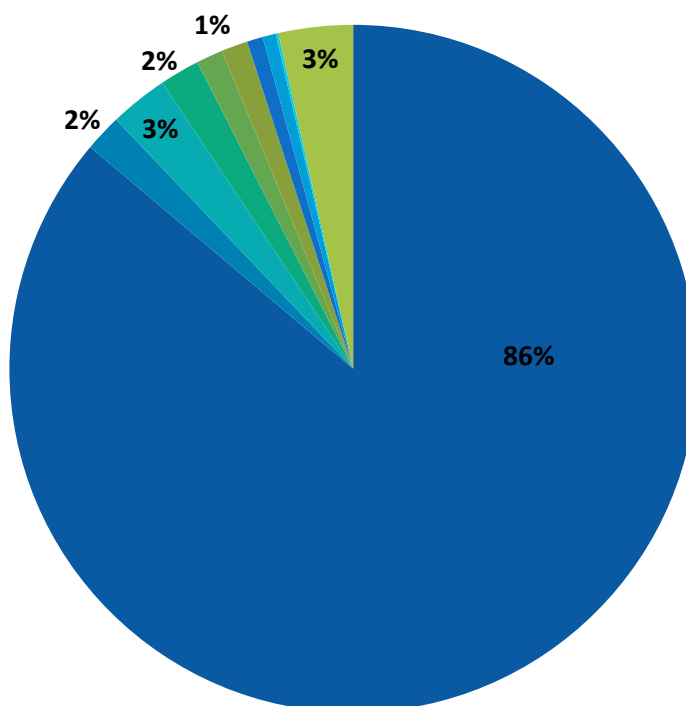


TVERC charges for data searches based on the time to extract and present the data and a contribution towards the annual cost of collating and managing the TVERC database. TVERC waive this charge for data searches for individuals, landowners and conservation organisations where the data will be used solely for conservation purposes. In these cases, a donation is requested, to cover the costs of extracting and presenting the data. We also waive the fee for initial single species & bat searches, so although we carried out 801 data searches, a charge was made for only 796 of these, bringing in a total income of £116,143 for 2017/18. We also supplied data to Thames Water under their five-year agreement with us.

The types of data searches are shown in the pie charts and tables overleaf.

Customer type 2017-18

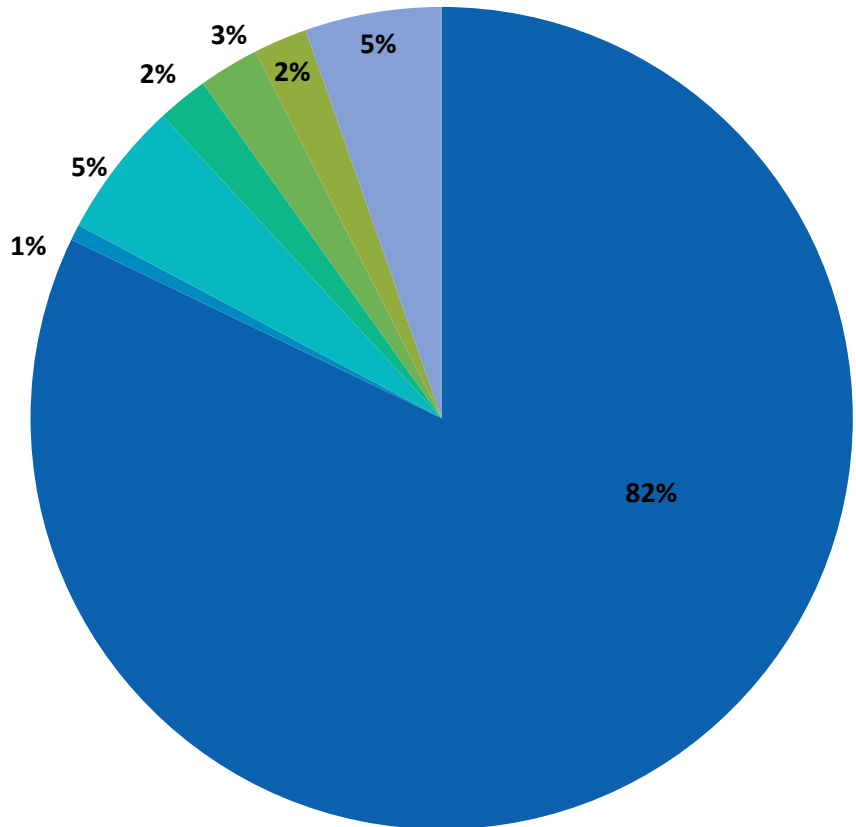
Customer	Total
Ecological Consultant	690
Ecological Consultant working for TVERC funding Partner	14
Landowner	22
Member of the public	15
Government Agency (non TVERC Partner)	10
Student/Teacher	10
Parish Council/Town Council/Neighbourhood Plan Group	6
Community Group	5
Local Recorder/Recording Group	1
Non-Government Organisation	0
Scientific Researcher	0
Other	28
TOTAL	801





Purpose of data search 2017-18

Purpose	Total
Planning application/development	658
Comment on a planning application	5
Land management (for conservation purposes)	43
Land management (other)	16
Utilities or infrastructure works	19
Education or research	17
Other	43
	801





DATA PROVISION TO PARTNERS

TVERC provided updated datasets to our partners. These are essential to ensure that our partners comply with planning policy and wildlife legislation and that sound decisions are made about where to focus conservation effort, how best to manage land and where to direct development to minimise impacts on the natural environment.

The updated datasets TVERC provided to partners were:

- Protected & notable species (July 2017 & January 2018)
- Buffered protected species & notable (January 2018)
- Local Wildlife Sites (May 2017)
- UK Priority Habitat (NERC Act S41 Habitats of Principle Importance) (January 2018)
- Invasive non-native species layer (July 2017, January 2018)

There were no changes to the following datasets:

- Conservation Target Areas / Biodiversity Opportunity Areas
- Local Geological Sites

IMPROVEMENTS TO EVIDENCE-BASE

WEST BERKS AND WINDSOR & MAIDENHEAD ANCIENT WOODLAND INVENTORY

TVERC prepared updated data for the ancient woodland inventory (AWI) in West Berkshire and Windsor & Maidenhead. The updated AWI, mapping the quality, extent and distribution of ancient woodland, will include sites under 2 ha (which were excluded from the original AWI) and provide a robust evidence base to help inform planning decisions, strategic plans and various environmental projects, such as planning for strategic infrastructure, considering planning applications, directing habitat conservation work, climate change adaptation and mitigation and wood-fuel initiatives. The work involves using GIS analysis of modern and historic maps, supported by field work, to assess whether currently wooded sites were likely have been wooded since at least 1600 and subsequently considered to be ancient woodland.



LOCAL SITES FOR WILDLIFE AND PEOPLE

TVERC carried out a project for Cherwell District Council in 2013, resulting in the identification of 63 sites of potential district importance for wildlife. The purpose in identifying sites of district value is to provide the local authority with additional information to inform the planning process. TVERC surveyed sites, produced individual reports and took them to a selection panel for assessment against a set of criteria, developed by TVERC and Cherwell DC.

Oxford City Council commissioned TVERC to undertake some preliminary surveys of sites in Oxford to determine which are likely to have biodiversity interest, as part of the Local Plan work. TVERC developed the selection criteria last year, and any sites identified as having the potential for biodiversity interest are likely to be surveyed in detail in Spring/Summer 2018.

BBOWT asked TVERC to carry out a survey of Spiceball Park as part of the Wild Banbury project.

A survey of a proposed LWS and possible SANGS was carried out for the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

South Leigh Neighbourhood Plan group have commissioned TVERC to carry out surveys of hedgerows in the parish to support their neighbourhood plan.

ACCESSIBLE NATURAL GREENSPACES

TVERC analysed accessible natural green space provision in Oxfordshire using the Natural England Accessible Natural Green Space Standards (ANGSt) for Oxfordshire County Council. The ANGSt standards outline the minimum provision of natural green space that is accessible to residents. There are large numbers of residences that do not meet even one of the five ANGSt requirements. In particular the area of Statutory Local Nature Reserves is insufficient and there is no accessible site larger than 500ha within 10km of any residences in Oxfordshire.

MONITORING CHANGE

BERKS SINGLE DATA LIST 160

TVERC provide an analysis of the SDL 160 for each of the Berkshire unitaries. Site management data is collated to calculate the number of local sites that are in positive management for the 6 Unitary Authorities. Local authorities are required to report to DEFRA on the SDL 160 each year as a measure of their success of protecting the biodiversity in their area.

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ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT

TVERC analyse environmental data and produce an annual monitoring report to Local Authorities in Berkshire and Oxfordshire. The AMR reports on a number of environmental indicators that help to monitor biodiversity within their district including changes to Local Wildlife Sites, Priority habitat and Priority Species, the status and distribution of water vole or farmland birds, SSSI condition and non agri-schemes habitat creation and management.

BRACKNELL FOREST BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

TVERC undertook a review of the Bracknell Forest biodiversity action plan.

CHILTERN'S BIRD INDICES

The Chilterns AONB are updating their management plan and were interested in biodiversity indicators to monitor the impact of the management plan. TVERC used BTO Breeding Bird Survey data to analyse trends in bird populations and produce indices of farmland and woodland birds over a 10-year period. The analysis also compared the fortunes of specialist versus generalist species.

CONSERVING WILDLIFE ON NATIONAL TRUST LAND

TVERC has collated and summarised data on designated sites, priority habitats and priority species on all National Trust sites in South East England. This involved collating data from eight Local Environmental Record Centres, Natural England and the National Trust into a report for each site, plus GIS datasets. This was no mean feat, as a total of 240 NT sites were assessed, and the data from within 1km of each of these sites totalled 839,979 records for species with a conservation designation, 358 statutory designated sites, 2,950 non-statutory designated sites and 26 priority habitat types covering 20,756ha. Now that the National Trust have a complete baseline of information, they could use it to prioritise and inform conservation management actions, along with the results of ongoing monitoring programme.



7. WE REMAIN AT THE CENTRE OF A NETWORK OF RECORDERS

TVERC has good relationships with local recorders and recording groups who are a key source of our data. We will strengthen these relationships so that TVERC remains the hub for biological recording in Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

Our Recording Coordinator post (previously called Volunteer Coordinator) has been made permanent and we have updated our website to clarify the services available to volunteer recorders.

8. PROVIDE VALUED SUPPORT TO, AND ENGAGEMENT WITH CURRENT AND FUTURE RECORDERS AND PARTNERS.

Biological recorders are essential to the future success of TVERC and to evidence based decision making. Much of the data in the TVERC database comes from volunteer recorders and so supporting them is an essential part of the work TVERC carry out.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

We provide technical support for recording groups who are collecting and analysing data across Oxfordshire and Berkshire. In 2017/18, TVERC provided assistance to:

ASHMOLEAN NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY OF OXFORDSHIRE

TVERC has been supporting the work of the Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire in its undertaking of a Rare Plants Register in Oxfordshire. Records have been collected by recorders over the last few years and the results have been processed and analysed by TVERC. Funding has been provided to TVERC to generate distribution maps of species which will be included within the register. The results of the mapping (and associated species narratives) will be included within a future on-line publication.

RSPB SWIFT CITY

RSPB are proposing to establish a swift city in Oxford. They will recruit and train volunteers to carry out surveys for swift nesting sites and to survey for foraging swifts, as well as install swift nesting boxes on existing and new buildings. They will also hold swift walks and talks and arts competitions. They also plan to build a swift tower. TVERC will provide a bespoke data entry form for swift records and analyse and present the swift data for partners and other local organisations.



EQUIPMENT LOAN

- Witney Woodland Volunteers – equipment loan, April 2017
- Lower Windrush Valley Project – equipment loan, May 2017
- Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew – equipment loan, March 2018

RECORDING GRANT

At the beginning of 2016, we reinstated our Recorders Grant Scheme to support projects that improve the quality, quantity and/or coverage of voluntary species recording in Berkshire and Oxfordshire. The fund is administered by Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE). Applications may be standalone grants to support better recording or they may be linked to a larger biodiversity application to TOE (www.trustforoxfordshire.org.uk). In 2017/18 we funded the following projects:

WINDMILL FARM WILDLIFE - £750

This AdventureBase (a multi activity centre offering young people the opportunity to experience outdoor activities such as mountain biking, climbing, bridge building, canoeing etc) will also provide unique opportunities for environmental education and increasing biodiversity on a 50 acre site including wheat fields with ponds, scrapes, hedgerow. The funds will help to: plant a new mixed hedgerow increasing connectivity and reducing fragmentation of the landscape; monitor wildlife and run wildlife events; and encourage volunteer participation.

WEST OXFORDSHIRE FARMLAND BIRD PROJECT - £1,936

Helping to provide bird ringing equipment to allow accurate monitoring of the impact of an on-going long-term project to increase the farmland bird population of West Oxfordshire and monitor population health. Taking place on 7 farms in the Vale and West Oxon, working with farmers. The main species focused on are Tree Sparrow (expanding the populations from Chimney Meadows and North Wiltshire), Corn Bunting, Skylark and Yellowhammer.

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

TVERC organise a local Recorders Conference to share information amongst volunteer recorders and increase their knowledge so they can provide us with even better data. We also provide training courses and talks to local groups.

End of Year Report 2017-18



TRAINING COURSES

To help increase identification skills, surveying techniques and encourage wildlife recording within Berkshire and Oxfordshire through running a number of day training courses on a wide range of species and habitats. In 2017 these included courses on hedgerows, invertebrates and otters as well as some informal 'recording days' for recorders to practice their skills and share knowledge with each other.

The River Thames Conservation Trust asked Ellen to deliver an otter training course for their members.

AUTUMN RECORDERS CONFERENCE - BERKSHIRE

Our autumn conference was held in October, generously hosted again by Oracle Corporation at its offices in Reading with the theme "Our Common Cause: Clubbing together for conservation". We know we need to collaborate with each other to get the best from our recording effort and lend strength to conservation actions. This conference offered the opportunity to hear from successful projects where joint working has been a central part. It included key presentations by Martin Moore on catchment co-operation initiatives that the Loddon Fisheries and Conservation Consultative have been involved in, plus Dr Jeremy Biggs of Freshwater Habitats Trust updating us on developments in Great Crested Newt conservation. The day followed the same format as this seems to work well, providing a varied pace and ways in which everyone can participate. Thanks so much to everyone attending and contributing.

SPRING RECORDERS CONFERENCE - OXFORDSHIRE

On Saturday 10th March 2018 we held our Spring Recorders' Conference at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology in Wallingford. We were delighted to have a really good turnout, with many local wildlife groups represented. Thank you to everyone who took part, especially if you gave a talk, led a workshop, were an event helper or brought along a display. Thank you also to the Grit Howe Charitable Trust for their funding, and to CEH for their support with hosting the conference. The day started with a presentation from Camilla Burrow and Dan Carpenter from TVERC, outlining the data that TVERC holds and also some of the analysis and resources that we have developed to aid better understanding of this information. There were three 'speed update' sessions where we heard 5-10 minutes from various local groups and recording schemes on a wide range of topics. We had a session called 'To TVERC and Beyond' with Ellen Lee, Giles Sutton and John Wenman which explained the process of how data is collated by TVERC and used by local authorities and ecological consultants. This reinforced the importance of having environmental data available to make evidence-based decisions. In the afternoon there was a choice of workshops to attend, on the themes of: field identification of spider families,



creating multi-access keys, craneflies and flora guardians. Our last presentation of the day was given by Nick Isaac from the Biological Records Centre at CEH. It was really interesting to hear how biological records are used at a national scale, and how bias is accounted for when looking at trends and distributions.

9. OUR VALUED AND RESPECTED STAFF RETAIN AND DEVELOP THEIR SKILLS, EXPERTISE AND KNOWLEDGE.

Highly skilled and experienced staff are key to TVERC's continued success. Volunteers are also vitally important in helping TVERC to maintain its high standards. We will continue to make our team feel valued.

OFFICE STAFF

We are a team of ten people, but as some of us work part-time, this is equivalent to 8.7 full-time staff.

Camilla Burrow, Director - Development and delivery of the TVERC service.

Dan Carpenter, Projects Manager – Delivering services to our local authority partners in Berkshire and Oxfordshire and developing and managing project work.

Graham Hawker and Ellen Lee, Biodiversity Data Services Officers – Data management, analysing and presenting data for commercial customers and project work.

Julie Kerans and Katherine Holmes, Oxfordshire and Berkshire Biodiversity Data Officers - Surveying local wildlife sites with the help of volunteers, analysing and presenting data for project work.

Yolanda Vazquez, Biodiversity Projects Officer - Surveying local wildlife sites (KH maternity cover), analysing and presenting data for project work.

Zoe Caals, Biological Recording Coordinator – Working with TVERC volunteers and recording groups to increase the quality and quantity of wildlife records and build up the volunteer network.

Kate Prudden, Admin Officer - Finance, admin & promotional tasks to ensure the smooth running of a busy office.

Katherine Lister, Biodiversity Data Assistant - Data management, presenting data for commercial customers and project work.

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NEW DATA ASSISTANT

Rachael Clemson left as our Data Assistant to take up a similar post with Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre, and be closer to her family. Katherine Lister started in this role in August 2017. This is Katherine's first formal job, which she started as she was completing a Masters degree in Biodiversity and Conservation. As a student, Katherine volunteered in the office of West Yorkshire Ecology Service, which gave her an insight into the importance of local records centres. Katherine is a trainee bird ringer with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), and has also been involved in various studies of bird behaviour and cognition. Originally from Yorkshire, Katherine took part in biodiversity monitoring with the Dearne Valley Landscape Partnership as well as practical conservation work with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust before moving down south.

NEW RECORDING COORDINATOR

Caroline Coleman also left, to take up a post with BBOWT. So a second addition to our team is our new Biological Records Co-ordinator, Zoe Caals. Zoe has worked for a number of environmental organisations including the New Forest National Park Authority, the National Trust (on Exmoor) and Trees for Life in the Scottish Highlands. She has carried out fieldwork on wading birds in New Zealand and has also volunteered on several conservation projects around the UK and New Zealand, often in very remote locations. For the last few years she has worked as a countryside ranger, however she also has many years' experience of working in data analysis and GIS. Particular interests include birds, trees, butterflies and marine life although she is keen to learn more about all wildlife.

EXTERNAL CONTRACTORS

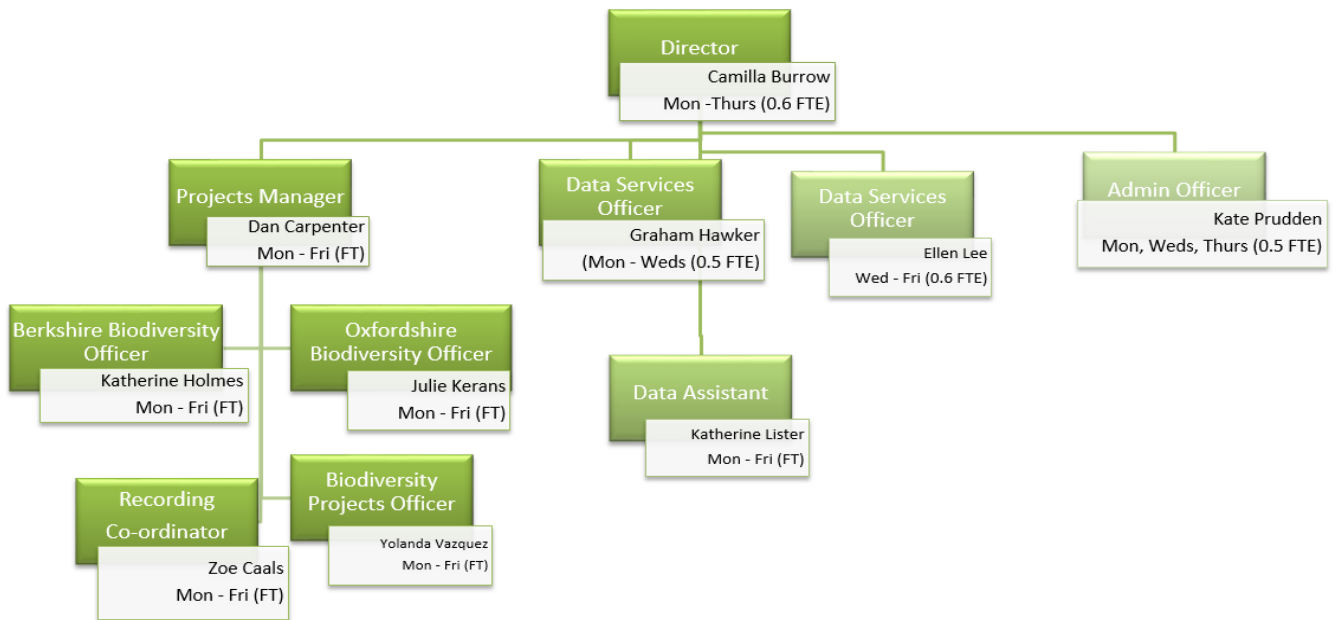
TVERC employ contractors with specialist expertise where necessary. In 2017/18 we engaged a technical IT consultant 5 days a month to assist with automating our data management and provision services. We also engaged an IT consultant to investigate options for managing our species data, a solicitor to advise on what type of organization an independent TVERC should be, and some surveyors to carry out Local Wildlife Site surveys in Berkshire to cover the maternity leave of our Berkshire Biodiversity Officer.

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REPORTING STRUCTURE

The current structure is shown below:



VOLUNTEERS

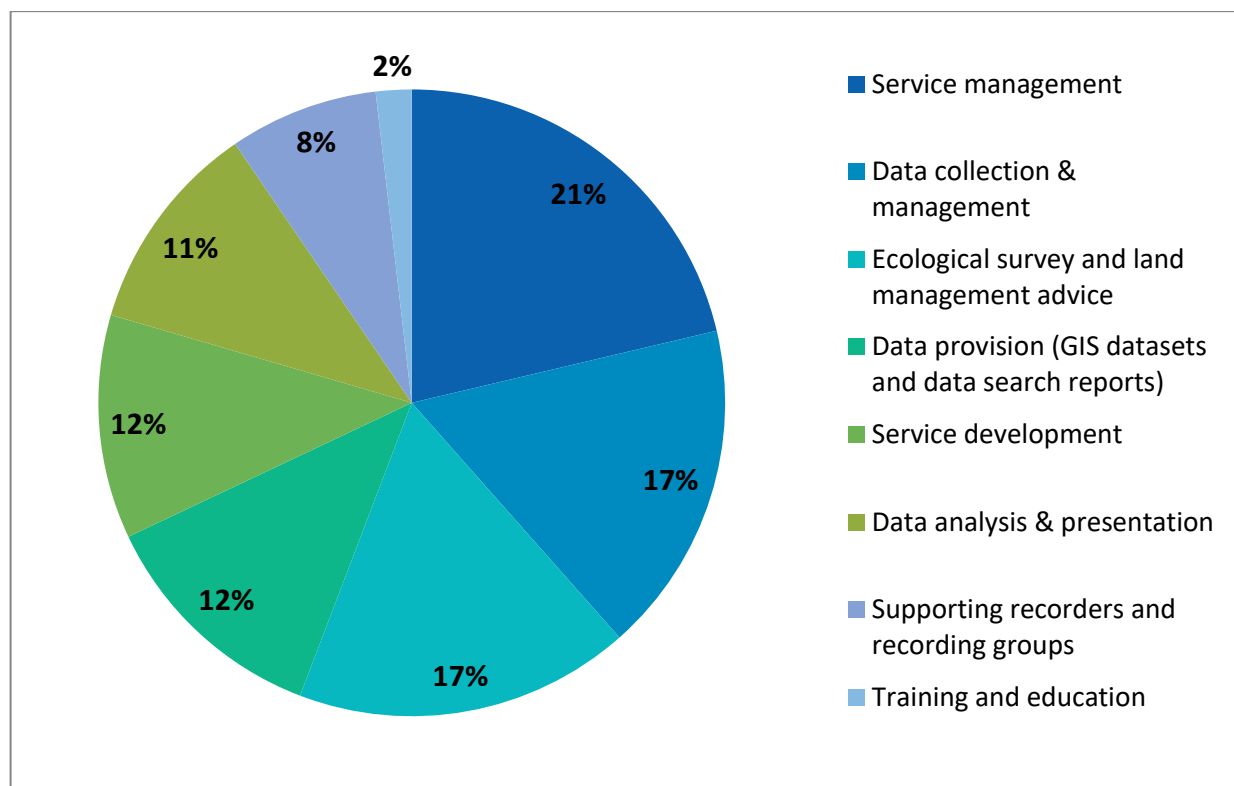
TVERC are fortunate to get the help of volunteers to carry out some data processing, species recording and site surveys. In 2017/18, volunteers carried out seven days of specialist surveys on six Local Wildlife Sites. We also rely on help from volunteers to manage and input data into our database. In 2017/18, eighteen office volunteers carried out 126 days of data management. If this work had been carried out by paid staff, it would have cost TVERC over £13k.

End of Year Report 2017-18

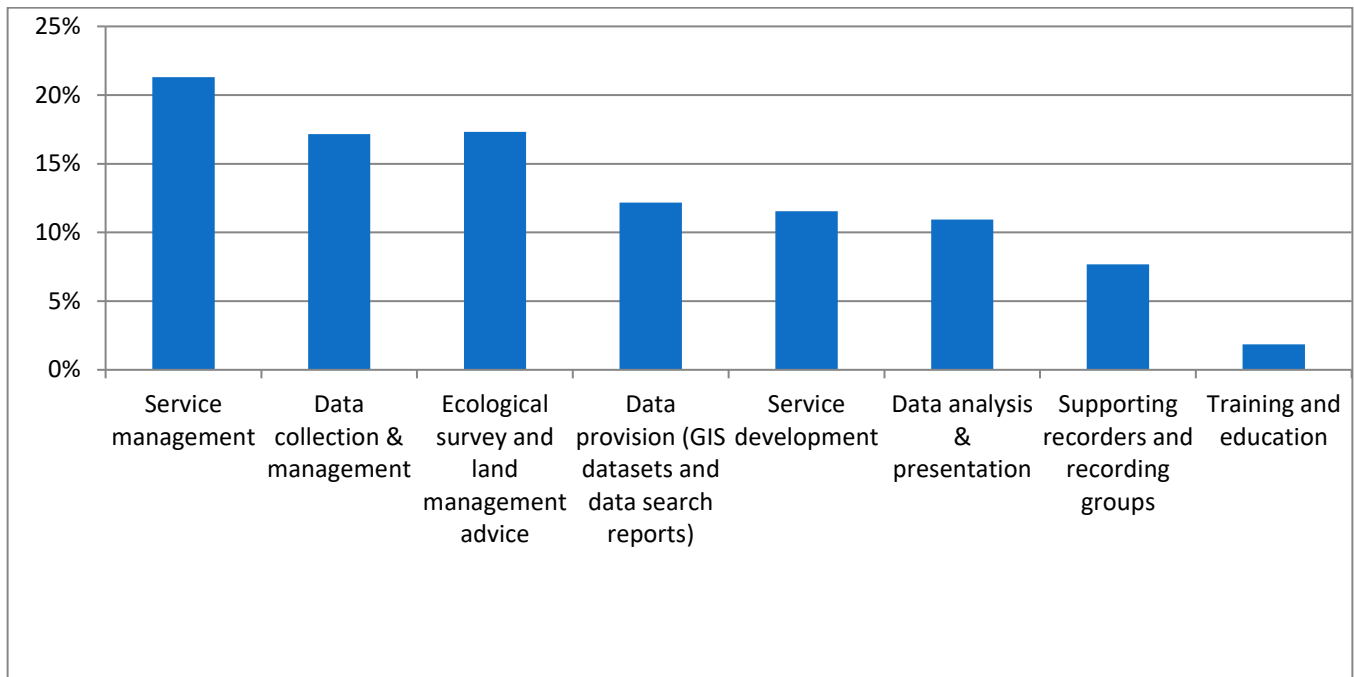


The charts below illustrate the time spent by the TVERC team on different elements of the TVERC work programme during 2017-18.

Summary 2017-18	Days	Percentage
Service management	373	21%
Data collection & management	301	17%
Ecological survey and land management advice	304	17%
Data provision (GIS datasets and data search reports)	213	12%
Service development	202	12%
Data analysis & presentation	192	11%
Supporting recorders and recording groups	135	8%
Training and education	32	2%



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10. WE LIVE IN A BETTER ENVIRONMENT AS A RESULT OF DECISIONS MADE USING OUR DATA AND INFORMATION.

A healthy functioning natural environment is vital for supporting a healthy and functioning society, as well as being of intrinsic importance. TVERC will monitor the state of the natural environment for the benefit of everyone.



FINANCE

TVERC is a 'not-for-profit' organisation so any surplus income over expenditure is re-invested into the service, except for that which is held in the Reserve. TVERC is an internal trading unit within OxonCC meaning that our budget must balance to zero each financial year, but we can hold funds in a separate Reserve account.

The Director is responsible for ensuring that sufficient income is obtained each year to cover the costs of running the TVERC service. Financial forecasts are reviewed monthly, with reports to the Steering Group every three months. Charges may be increased or decreased differently than is forecast here, depending on the future situation. TVERC will work to ensure that any fee increases are kept to a minimum for all our customers by ensuring our processes are as efficient as possible.

In comparison with last year, the income from data searches has increased whilst the income from licences has been stable. The income from projects was a total of over £77.5k which was well above the target of £65k and is a great achievement for our Projects Manager and the rest of the team.

The biggest expenditure is on staff salaries. However, staff time is also the biggest asset TVERC has, as it's the staff time spent on projects, data searches and data licences which bring in the income.

We ended 2017-18 with a net underspend of £39.4k, which leaves TVERC in a strong position to continue to invest in improving our service, ensuring we are resilient to change and allowing us to move forwards with plans to become independent of OxonCC.

End of Year Report 2017-18

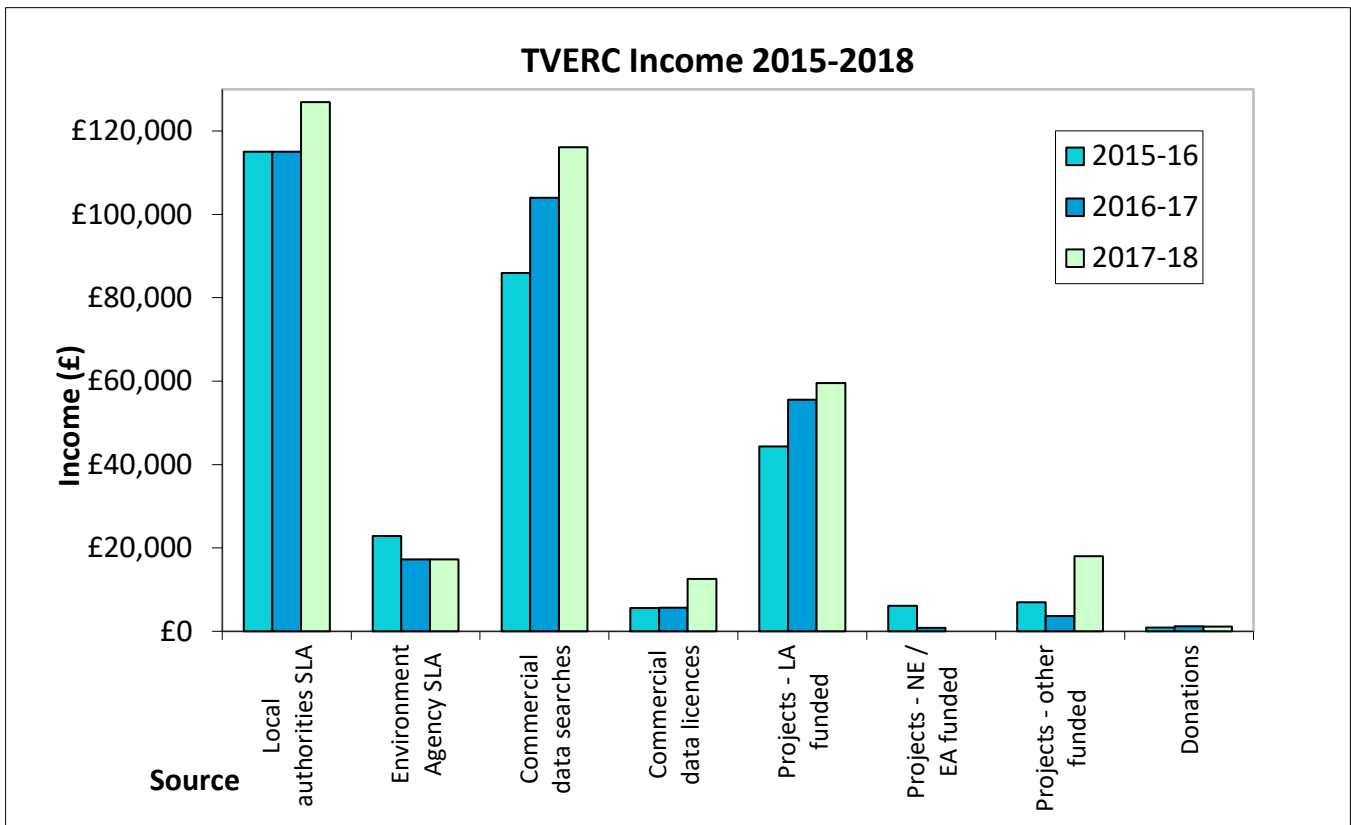


INCOME

TVERC is funded via a number of ways, as shown in the table below. All of these funding streams contribute to the annual cost of collating and managing the TVERC database, resulting in economies of scale for our customers.

In 2017/18 we secured more income from our annual agreements with local authorities and for commercial data searches, as our charges increased slightly. We also made more from commercial data licences due to data being required for some large infrastructure projects. Our income from projects NOT funded by local authorities increased significantly from under £4k to almost £18k.

Income	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Local authorities SLA	£115,038	£115,038	£126,899
Environment Agency SLA	£22,835	£17,280	£17,280
Commercial data searches	£85,914	£103,977	£116,143
Commercial data licences	£5,600	£5,700	£12,545
Projects - LA funded	£44,361	£55,523	£59,543
Projects - NE / EA funded	£6,115	£825	£0
Projects - other funded	£6,983	£3,642	£17,998
Donations	£895	£1,205	£1,160
TOTAL	£287,741	£303,190	£349,248



EXPENDITURE

The majority of TVERC’s income is spent on staff (including volunteer expenses). Our staff and volunteers are the biggest asset TVERC has, as it’s the staff time spent on projects, data searches and data licenses which bring in the income. Our staff and volunteers also work continuously to improve the TVERC service and data products we can offer our funders.

Our expenditure was fairly consistent in 2017-18 although there was a slight decrease in staff costs due to maternity leave and temporary staff vacancies. This was balanced by higher project costs, which included the cost of hiring consultants to complete some project work to cover staffing gaps.

We also invested more in our service due to some consultancy work to enable us to separate our ICT systems from OxonCC in future, and to further automate our data search service and other processes.

End of Year Report 2017-18



Expenditure	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Staff (salaries, expenses, training)	£246,318	£283,772	£263,562
Project expenses	£3,105	£852	£5,199
Overheads (equipment, printing, postage, subscriptions)	£2,829	£3,636	£764
Premises (paid 'in kind' by OCC)	£16,500	£16,500	£16,500
Recorders Conference	£905	£3,321	£3,383
Investment in service (data tools, website etc)	£10,465	£13,948	£22,936
TOTAL	£280,122	£322,029	£312,344

MANAGING FINANCIAL RISK

Due to Oxon CC accounting rules, the Business account must balance to £0 at the end of each financial year, but 'surplus' monies or deficits can be moved into or out of a Balancing account. The TVERC Reserve is also kept in the Balancing account. The TVERC Reserve mitigates TVERC from financial risk. The policy that the Reserve covers the costs of staff redundancies plus three months running costs was agreed by the Steering Group in the September 2012 meeting.

At the end of 2017/18, there was £295,787.64 in the TVERC Balancing Account. The table below outlines what this is allocated for.

Project funding RIA (to be carried forward to 18/19)	
RBWM Ancient Woodland Inventory	£6,737.50
Natural Capital Investment Plan	£45,000.00
National Trust data	£1,375.00
Thames Water data licence 2018/19	£5,250.00
Thames Water data licence 2019/20	£5,250.00
Reserve	
Redundancy costs	£46,000.00
3 months running costs	£80,000.00
Enabling fund	
Move & independence costs	£106,175.14