The UK’s ‘nature heroes’ announced – winners of the NBN Awards for Wildlife Recording 2024

Wednesday 4 December, 2024

The winners of the UK-wide NBN Awards for Wildlife Recording 2024 have been announced at a ceremony on Thursday 21 November 2024, during the annual National Biodiversity Network Conference, taking place - this year - at the Merseyside Maritime Museum, in Liverpool.

These national Awards recognise and celebrate the outstanding contributions adults and young people are making to wildlife recording and data sharing, which is helping to improve our understanding of the UK’s biodiversity and assisting conservation efforts.

There are seven Award categories this year:

- NBN Lifetime Achievement Award (open to individuals 21 years +)
- NBN Verifier’s Award (open to individuals 21 years +)
- NBN Young Person’s Award (open to individuals aged 11-20)
- NBN Newcomer Award (open to individuals 21 years +)
- NBN Award for Marine Wildlife Recording (open to individuals 21 years +)
- NBN Award for Terrestrial Wildlife Recording (open to individuals 21 years +)
- NBN Group Award (no age restrictions)

Roger Morris (from Surrey) and **Stuart Ball** (from Cambridgeshire) are the joint-winners of the inaugural **NBN Lifetime Achievement Award 2024**. This duo has been joint scheme organisers for the Hoverfly Recording Scheme since 1990. In the 1990s they successfully reinvigorated the scheme after a period of relative inactivity, and it has gone from strength to strength since then – with this pair at the helm. They published a provisional hoverfly atlas in 2000, followed by a full atlas in 2011, and have continued to collate a very large number of records from very many recorders since then.

Roger Morris, joint-winner of the NBN Lifetime Achievement Award 2024, says:

“Conservation science needs robust datasets and therefore the objective of the scheme is not only to encourage high levels of recording but also to try to ensure that recording is comprehensive.”

Stuart Ball, joint-winner of the NBN Lifetime Achievement Award 2024, adds:

“I have been interested for close on 50 years in how to capture, store and analyse records including being involved in designing, writing and supporting recording systems and methods of analysis such as mapping, extracting trends and species distribution modelling. I have also had a long-term interest in automating identification – such as multi matching keys, image recognition, etc.”

Stuart Roberts (from Wiltshire) and **Matt Smith** (from Berkshire) are the joint-winners of the inaugural **NBN Verifier’s Award 2024**. This pair are part of the verification team for Bees Wasps & Ants Recording Society (BWARS), and between them they have carried out the bulk of the verification for aculeate Hymenoptera in iRecord. They also founded the UK Bees, Wasps and Ants group on Facebook, which now has over 28,000 members, many of whom have benefited from the duo’s guidance on identification, recording and natural history. While active on iSpot and iNaturalist – both these individuals have verified over 150,000 records each on iRecord, having been involved since the early days of iRecord in 2012/2013.

Stuart Roberts, joint-winner of the inaugural NBN Verifier’s Award 2024, says:

“I am passionately interested in bringing in new enthusiasts and recorders alike. I like to help volunteer recorders feel they are part of a world that is bigger than the individual and I have always believed that the value of data is in its use rather than its mere possession.”

Matt Smith, joint-winner of the inaugural NBN Verifier’s Award 2024, adds:

“We encourage new recorders who have had their photos identified via Facebook to post them on iRecord so they are not ‘lost’. If we ask them to submit their records then we need to verify them to encourage more citizen science recording while keeping the data quality of the verified records high.”

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18-year old **Ben Rumsby** (from Essex) is the **winner** of the **NBN Young Person's Award 2024** and has been a member of RSPB for 11 years, of Essex Wildlife Trust for 12 years, of BTO for 8 years and of Essex Bird Watching Society for 5 years. He has been a registered volunteer for RSPB for over three years, helping with the WEBS Survey and Redshank & Lapwing survey. Ben volunteers every Saturday surveying birds on site – for around 25 hours per month - opening hides and safety checks and helping to run Young Birders, and 'birding for beginners' walks. He also volunteers with Essex Wildlife Trust doing glow worm surveys – usually three times a year.

Ben Rumsby, winner of the NBN Young Person's Award 2024, enthuses:

"What excites me about biological recording is the thrill of how each recording session is different and what you might find. Since becoming a volunteer at RSPB Rainham Marshes I help with the Lapwing and Redshank Wader Surveys as well as undertaking Breeding Bird Surveys as well. I enjoy being able to contribute all vital data recording towards the site and nationwide."

Charlotte Shenkin (from Jersey) is the **winner** of the **NBN Newcomer Award 2024** and first became interested in fungi in October 2022. She has a background in conservation of reptiles and amphibians and as a Biology teacher, but no previous involvement or knowledge on fungi. Charlotte's identification and microscopy skills are self-taught and she has recorded 900 fungi specimens from March to December 2023. Her records have been added to the Jersey Biodiversity Centre database. She has recorded 25+ species of fungi that were previously unseen in Jersey and has sent various rare samples to Kew to be stored. Charlotte also found a UK-first in July 2023, *Russula stenocystidiata* which was confirmed by DNA and is officially the 154th species of *Russula* in the UK.

Charlotte Shenkin, winner of the NBN Newcomer Award 2024, says:

"I'm irresistibly drawn to surveying and recording fungi, because it's like there is an exciting treasure hunt on, 24/7, all year round! You just have to start looking! Finding and recording fungi gives a me the perfect blend of mindful meditation, immersion in nature, scientific curiosity, collecting data and knowledge and ultimately the enjoyment of sharing that knowledge with others. Being able to enhance scientific understanding of what's growing where is really the icing on the cake."

Charlotte Bolton (from Dorset) is the **winner** of the **NBN Award for Marine Wildlife Recording 2024**. She has led the Seasearch programme of the Marine Conservation Society since 2016. During this time, Charlotte has overseen the collection, collation and quality control of over 300,000 records. She has been recording marine wildlife for over sixteen years and her personal contribution recently exceeded an incredible 10,000 records spanning the full range of marine diversity from 21 different Phyla. More than 90% of these records also include estimates of abundance. In addition to taxonomic records, Charlotte has also made almost 1000 habitat records from a remarkable 132 different habitats (or biotopes) and, as a post-survey assessor, has determined hundreds of biotopes from the records of others.

Charlotte Bolton, winner of the NBN Award for Marine Wildlife Recording 2024, says:

"Having learned to dive in the Mediterranean over 20 years ago, I needed to learn to use a drysuit and dive in the UK to satisfy my urge to be underwater. I discovered Seasearch at about the same time, and was immediately hooked! It's great to put my hobby to good use and collect data to support conservation and management initiatives, not to mention forming friendships with like-minded people."

Katty Baird (from East Lothian) is the **winner** of the **NBN Award for Terrestrial Wildlife Recording 2024**. She
has taken the recording of moths in East Lothian to new heights - filling in many gaps in distribution by mobile trapping, and in the process, adding several new species – some new to Scotland. Katty has encouraged others to develop their interest in moths through organising moth trapping events, supporting school projects and lending traps to beginners, as well as by giving talks to local and national wildlife groups. Not only has Katty written a book "Meetings with moths" but she has also written a blog relating her moth finds to those of Alice Balfour, a lady who lived in East Lothian a hundred years ago – so reaching a wider audience of people keen on history who might not otherwise be interested in moths or in what their changing distribution tells us about climate change.

Katty Baird, winner of the NBN Award for Terrestrial Wildlife Recording 2024, says:

“Biological recording has led me to get to know my local area and its wildlife better - it's always exciting to discover new species on your doorstep. The biological recording community is very supportive and being part of that, both learning from others and sharing my knowledge, is very rewarding.”

MammalWeb is the **winner** of the **NBN Group Award 2024**. It is a national not-for-profit organisation, established in 2013 in collaboration between Durham University and Durham Wildlife Trust, to address the information deficit on the status and ecology of UK and European wild mammals. Camera traps are deployed by members of the public to capture images of wildlife and the resultant images are uploaded to MammalWeb where they are then classified online, either by the people that deployed the camera traps (‘trappers’) or by other participants (‘spotters’). MammalWeb integrates AI and machine-learning to help process the millions of images captured, filtering out images of humans and false triggers (containing no wildlife) so that participant effort can be focussed on those images likely to contain animals.

Philip Stephens, Founding Director of **MammalWeb** – the winner of the NBN Group Award 2024, says:

“We’re a huge community of enthusiasts, with a great range of motivations. The main thing that unites us is a fascination for the wild mammals around us. Although they are mostly elusive and secretive, we love the insights we can gain through the use of camera traps, giving us glimpses into their distribution, abundance and behaviours, and assisting with their conservation!”

Lisa Chilton, Chief Executive Officer of the NBN Trust, says:

"We are delighted to be celebrating the achievements of these NBN Award winners today. These amazing wildlife recorders, who are advancing our knowledge of the UK's biodiversity - as well as inspiring others to take up the monitoring of wildlife - are wholly deserving of our congratulations!

"Recording which plants, animals and fungi exist in different locations and habitats is the foundation of wildlife conservation - without this vital information we can't tell if our collective efforts to save and restore different species are working or not. Today's Award-winning wildlife recorders - many of them volunteers - are all making their wildlife data work to restore nature!"

This year the NBN Trust is indebted to seven organisations for their support and sponsorship of the NBN Award prizes:

1. RSPB

2. Opticron

3. Habitat Aid

4. Field Studies Council (FSC)

5. William Collins

6. British Wildlife

7. NHBS.

In addition to these seven NBN Awards for Wildlife Recording which were open to public nomination, a further award was announced – the **John Sawyer NBN Open Data Award 2024**. This Award is given to a member of the National Biodiversity Network Trust who is making a valuable contribution to open biodiversity data in the UK and celebrates the outstanding contribution of NBN Data Partners towards achieving the NBN Trust’s mission of “making data work for nature”.

The **Terrestrial Heteroptera Recording Scheme (Shieldbugs & allied species)** is the winner of the **John Sawyer NBN Open Data Award 2024**.

This national recording scheme shares over 160,000 records in three data resources on the NBN Atlas of 95 species from the taxon group. 100% of their records have verified identifications. 89% of the records are shared on an Open licence and 82% have a resolution of 100 m or higher. The datasets cover the period 1800 to October of this year. **/Ends.**

For more information, to arrange interviews, and for images of the winners, please contact **Purba Choudhury**, NBN Communications Officer, via: **p.choudhury@nbn.org.uk**

Notes to Editors:

1. These annual, national, wildlife awards started in 2015, and were previously known as the **UK Awards for Biological Recording and Information Sharing**. They were originally developed by the National Biodiversity Network Trust, the National Forum for Biological Recording and the Biological Records Centre.
2. The National Biodiversity Network Trust (NBN Trust) is the UK's largest partnership for nature. It is a collaboration of over 200 organisations committed to sharing UK wildlife data and making it easily available – using the **NBN Atlas**: nbnatlas.org
3. The NBN Atlas currently holds over 300 million records across over 51,000 species – from ladybirds, red squirrels and toads through to rare lichen, fungi and endangered insects – and these are available for use according to their licence.
4. The NBN Atlas is helping to enthuse people about nature and improving our collective wildlife knowledge, which assists everyone's conservation efforts.

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