

OPEN DATA DILEMMAS IN THE UK

Nigel Bourn, Richard Fox and
Martin Warren



**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

Background to BC datasets

BC (UK) has 3 large datasets on Lepidoptera with almost 60 million records:

37 million distribution records -

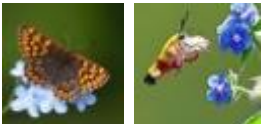
- 12 m butterfly records
- 25 m moth records
- 28 million monitoring records (through UKBMS shared with CEH)

+ Huge volunteer base:

130 expert County Recorders ensuring verification and hence the high quality of the data

45,000 plus recorders

- Pre 2000 data (6.5 million) available at 2km level
- Post 2000 data not freely available at present



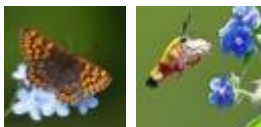
The open data debate

Increasing pressure for open data from

- Recorders (some)
- Conservationists
- Scientific community
- Government and their agencies such Defra, NE, Scottish Government, SNH, Welsh Government, NRW

Resistance to open data from

- Recorders (some)
- Conservationists (some)



Cons

- Lack of collaborative working
- Lack of credit when data are used
- Loss of IPR
- Inappropriate use of data (bad science)
- Risk that others may publish local or national atlases before us
- Possible loss of income
- Problems with sensitive sites and confidential records (most are not currently flagged)
- Some recorders and County Recorders may disagree and refuse to contribute in future

Pros

- Greater visibility of BC data
- Greater use for conservation and research
- More scope for collaboration with researchers
- Many funders want it (eg Gov agencies)
- Many recorders expect it
- May increase levels of recording
- Gain of reputation from embracing open data

Assessing views of recorders

Extensive consultation undertaken in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in 2017

Questionnaire sent to:

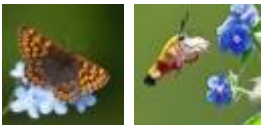
Branch Chairs (our local volunteers)

County Recorders

Recorders

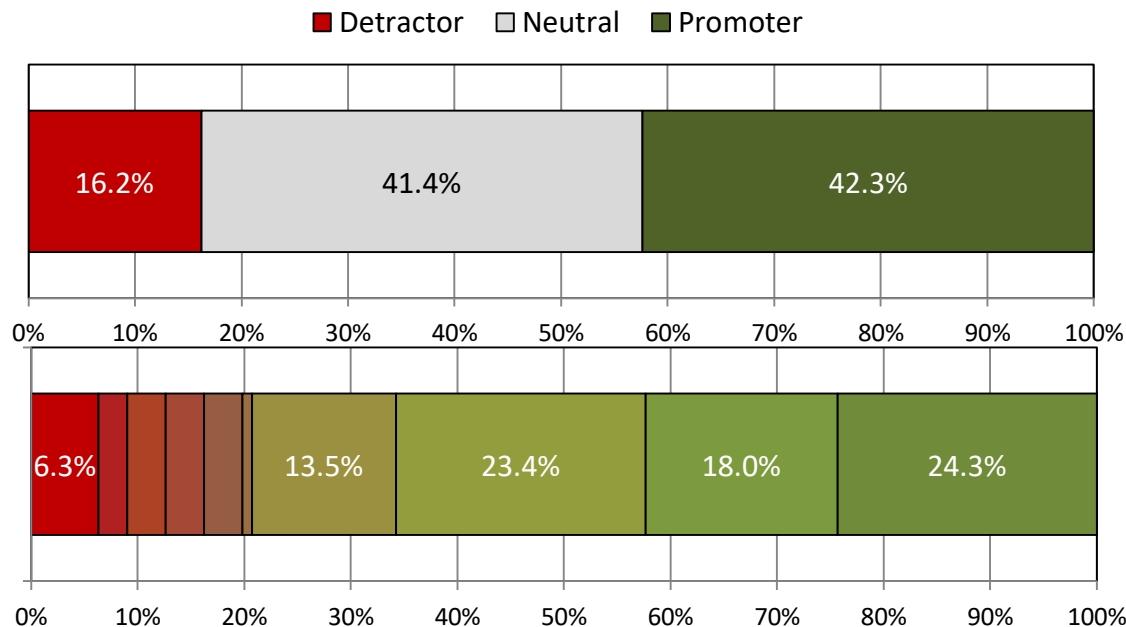
Over two thirds of the branches and County recorders responded (over 100 returns)

Also over 500 general recorders responded

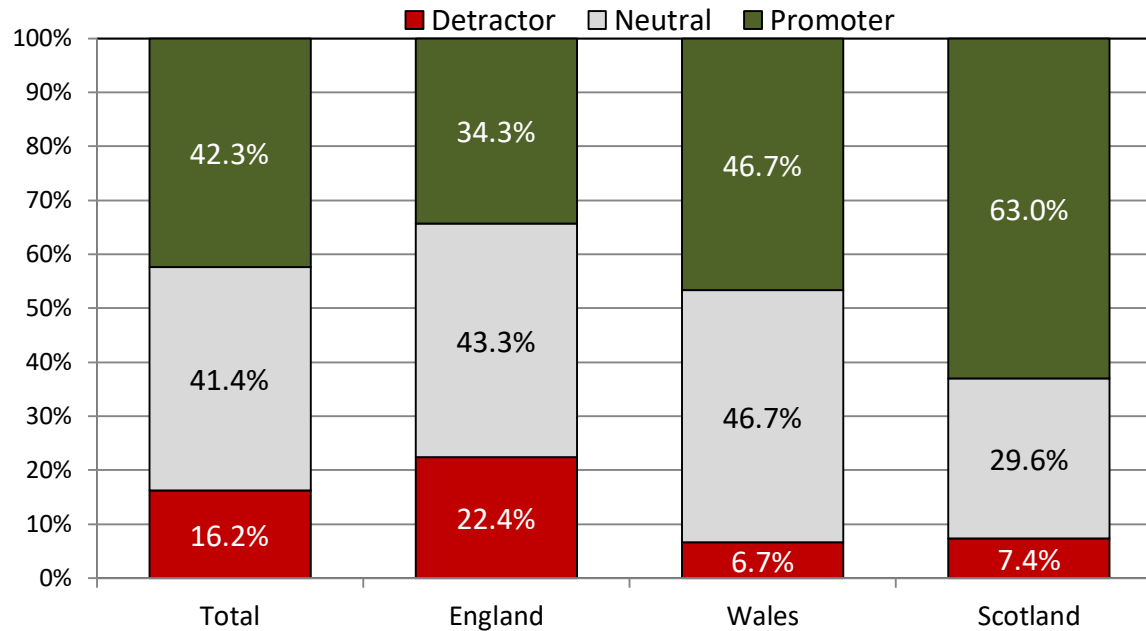


Summary results – County Recorders supportive - but

- Over 80% of County Recorders are strongly supportive (42.3%) or neutral (41.4%) about the principle of open access, but a sizable minority (16.2%) had a negative view of the subject.

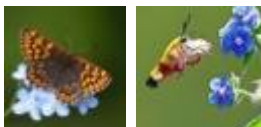
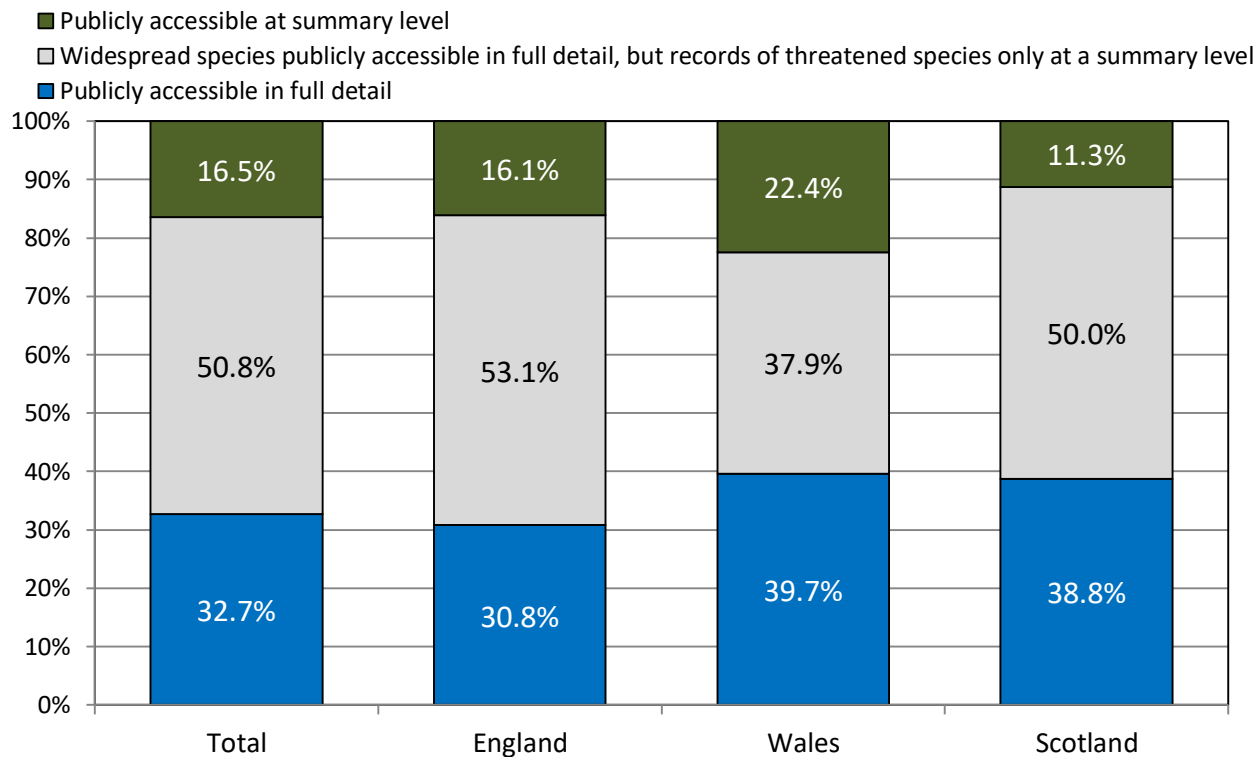


The English County Recorders are more sceptical



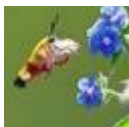
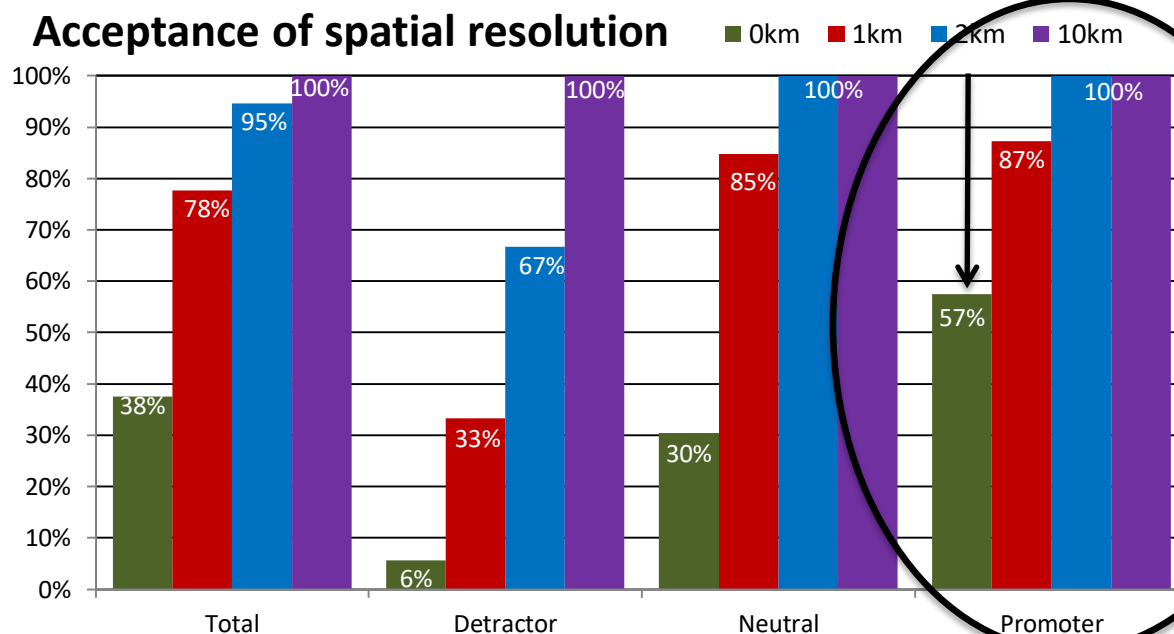
Recorders supportive but minority not so

- 84% of recorders were in favour of capture resolution open data for records of widespread species.



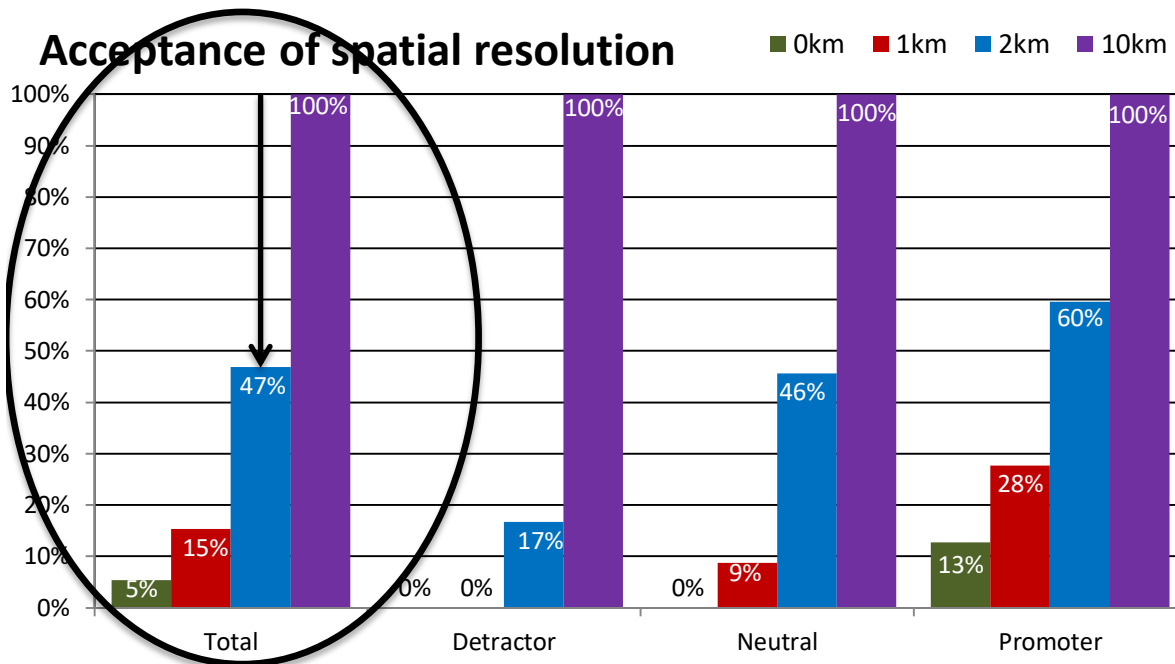
Views on widespread species

- A reduction of spatial resolution gains more support
- Even two thirds of detractors come some way at 2km
- But over 40% of promoters don't wish to see 'full' open data



Views on restricted species

- Over 50% wish to see restricted access to rare/threatened species even at 2km resolution



Conclusions

- We need the continuing support and goodwill of County Recorders
- BC is committed to a transition to open data but it will need to be via a gradual 'change management' approach.
- This will require investment over several years in our data capture and management systems, increased support to County Recorders and, possibly, an evolution of their future role.
- Watch this space!

