Submitting records of butterflies and moths for The Naturalist

by Norman Hall: recorder for lepidoptera.

Records should be submitted in electronic form if possible, but can be hand-written. Most of the records I receive are retrieved from on-line databases used by recorders. The data are usually already in an ideal format, but sometimes lack any column giving a reference number for the species such as the Bradley number or the Agassiz number, which I have to add myself before processing the results (a process which is time-consuming, and I could do well without).

These notes are for those who can send me records in Excel in tables they construct themselves, or who use an Excel template of mine that is available on the society’s website.

Any individual record should always contain the name of the species, the date, the name of the locality where it was seen and the name of the identifier (usually yourself).

Ideally the grid reference of the locality and the number of the species present should also be quoted.

Individual records should be on separate lines in the Excel table.

For example, records for the first occurrence and last occurrence of moths and butterflies should be on separate lines whether they are at the same locality or not

A ‘comments’ column in your table should include comments such as ‘earliest record’, ‘latest record’, ‘high count’ or anything special you can say about that particular record, such as ‘first for garden’ or ‘attracted to a pheromone’ or ‘resting on a wall’.Comments such as ‘Very few this year’ which refer to the species but not to a specific date should be put on their own line with the species name and locality but no date.

Iit doesn’t matter if the species name you give is the English name or the scientific name or both. If you can give me the Bradley [and Fletcher] number or the newer Agassiz, [Beavan and Heckford] number, this can save me a lot of work

The reason why I prefer records to be given me in this form is that I must get everybody’s records into this form in a single table as the first step in processing them (and last year I had 16000 records to process!).

After that, the data is put as a table into my own database, where I can automatically add the Agassiz numbers where necessary and check these numbers against species names. Even within the database It is easy to find the Agassiz numbers given the Bradley numbers, but not always easy to find Agassiz numbers from the input English names or scientific taxon names. These may contain spelling errors – or the spelling in my database may not be the same as the spelling in my database (e.g Orange Tip instead of Orange-tip) and they may include scientific names that are now out-of-date. The generic name is particularly liable to change.

My database uses the scientific names in the Agassiz, Beavan and Heckford checklist (2013) with errata corrected.

I can also automatically add data on the national status (common, scarce, notable, rare etc)

The entire data table is then sorted primarily by Agassiz number and then by date.

Data from common species is eliminated at this point unless someone has reported something interesting, for example, an extremely early occurrence or a second brood or something anecdotal, which is why commenting on your records is so valuable.

Now, the table is ready for pasting back via Excel into Word, eliminating duplicated information (such as repeated species names) and surplus information and adding punctuation and line spaces in the process.

This serves the basis for the report which I edit manually.