iRecord verifiers' newsletter January 2020

Dear iRecord verifier,

This email is being sent to everyone who currently has a verification role linked to their account on the iRecord website. Topics included:

- BRC recording schemes meeting 2020
- A busy year in 2019
- iRecord technical developments
- iNaturalist records
- Controlling the records you see
- Release of records previously 'hidden' from verifiers
- Communication reminders

BRC recording schemes meeting 2020

BRC's regular meeting for recording scheme representatives takes place in Edinburgh this year, on Saturday 7 March. You should already have received an invitation to this, and if you're able to attend please book your place here: https://ceh-online-surveys.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/brc-meeting-2020

The draft programme can be see here: https://www.brc.ac.uk/brc-scheme-meeting-2020

A busy year in 2019

At the time of writing (6 January) just over 1.5 million records for year 2019, of around 18,000 different species, have been made available for verification on iRecord. But over 2 million records were actually added during 2019, some of them for previous years.

The most frequently recorded species in 2019 were all butterflies, with Meadow Brown coming out top with over 75,000 records. This is partly a result of the fact that UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme data is held in the database that underlies iRecord. Pipistrelle bat was the most-recorded non-butterfly.

Of the records added during 2019, over three-quarters of a million have already been verified. And in fact over a million records were actually checked by verifiers during 2019 if you include records added in previous years. Whichever way you look at the numbers, this represents an enormous amount of work on the part of the iRecord verifiers – thank you.

iRecord technical developments

Elasticsearch verification page
Work has continued on this new version of the verification page. At the time of writing there are still a few issues to fix, but a lot of updates have been made and feedback suggests it is working well. Feedback and suggestions for further developments in future are welcome as always, either via the verifiers' forum pages or to irecord@ceh.ac.uk.

We are in the process of updating the guidance documents associated with the verification process, so that they match the new page. It will take a little longer for this to be completed, but a start has been made here: https://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/resources-verify

At some point in the coming months we will be turning off the old verification page (which in the past has caused problems for iRecord performance generally). In preparation for that the menu structure is changing slightly. At the moment we have the old and new pages listed:

This will change so that the menu called "Verify" will lead to the new page, with the old page available via a submenu until it is switched off. In place of "Verify - new" we will have a new menu "Verifiers' resources", which will give access to the new guidance documents and any other links that are part of the verification process. These two menus are visible only to verifiers.

We will be running some online webinars to provide demonstrations of the new verification page for anyone who wishes to join – details to follow.

Other technical developments

As usual our developers have been busy maintaining and enhancing the iRecord system. Recent developments include:

- The verification grid now displays identification difficulty flags for species at all times. Previously the flags were hidden if a recorder had had records accepted for the species in question, and it is still the case that recorders stop receiving notifications for 'difficult' species after they have had several records of that species accepted (to avoid multiple repetitions of the same notification).
- A framework is now in place for "dynamic attributes". What this means is that the list of terms for sex and stage will now be customised so that they are appropriate for the species being recorded. This means, for example, that insect recorders will be able to choose between egg, larva or pupa, rather than having to use "pre-adult" on the main iRecord forms. Dynamic attributes will be available shortly on both the website and the app.
- Website performance continues to be monitored, and changes made to areas that cause the site to run slowly (for example, an annual summary report for the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme was causing the system to slow, and has been adjusted to avoid that). As the elasticsearch tools start to be more widely implemented we expect overall performance to continue improving.
- Maps now support dynamic layers which auto-switch between OpenStreetMap, OS Leisure and Google Satellite, reducing dependency on the paid Google service which was becoming unaffordable.
- A new "territorial waters" map boundary is available that can be used to filter marine records more effectively (if you are a marine verifier let us know if you would like this set up)
- iRecord uses species names from the UK Species Inventory, maintained by the Natural History Museum. A full synchronisation was carried out last September to bring iRecord up to date with the UKSI as it was at that time. We continue to add new species names as they become available.

iNaturalist records

As discussed last year, we've been reviewing the feedback received as a result of the import of records from the iNaturalist system into iRecord. As is often the case in biological recording, a wide range of opinions were expressed, with some verifiers welcoming the integration of this data into the iRecord system as a way of mobilising more records, and others finding it problematic, including issues with the accuracy of locations and dates for a small proportion of the records. If you have not already provided feedback to us please do get in touch.

We will be pausing the import of iNaturalist records again, while we resolve some issues on the iRecord side of things. However, others (such as the use of pseudonyms for recorder names) are not within our control. The import process is likely to start up again in March or April. But verifiers are under no compulsion to deal with this source of records if they don't wish to! See the next item.

Controlling the records you see

Different recording schemes and verifiers have different requirements for the records they wish to deal with. We can control the records you see by setting up filters for particular sets of records, or excluding particular sets of records if they are not relevant to you. For example, if you do not wish to have the iNaturalist records appearing in your verification grid we can exclude them, or we can put them into their own filter so that you can deal with them separately from the normal iRecord records. Similarly, some recording schemes include the Channel Islands and some don't, and we can set up your filters as required.

If you need any changes to your verification filters please contact us via irecord@ceh.ac.uk

Release of records previously 'hidden' from verifiers

We have found two issues in the database that affected how some records were being exposed to verifiers. Changes in the processing of these batches of data will result in a one-off increase in pending records for some verifiers. The largest numbers will be for moths, butterflies and dragonflies. Many apologies that these weren't correctly allocated at the time the records were entered; we have fixed the underlying issues to prevent this reoccurring. Read on for the details, and if you have any concerns over this issue please get in touch with us.

UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme – records of species other than butterflies

The UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme uses auto-verification, so that if a butterfly has been recorded by one of their transect walkers and is not a 'difficult' species and is within the usual range and the usual phenology, it is automatically accepted as "considered correct". However, butterfly transect recorders sometimes record other species groups while on the transect, such as day-flying moths. These other groups were also being included in the auto-verification process. Following feedback from recording schemes, auto-verification is now restricted to butterflies only within the UKBMS. Records of other species groups will be reset to "pending" so that they can be assessed by verifiers in the normal way. The main groups affected are moths and dragonflies.

Various records, mostly butterflies, from 2014–2015

A technical problem resulted in a number of records (predominantly from 2014 and 2015) being hidden from the default "pending" verification view. These are records that you may have seen flagged with a verification status of "In progress" if you have downloaded a csv file.

The vast majority of these records are of butterflies from the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme, and once set to "pending" they will be processed by the auto-verification system as described above. But there will be a proportion of the butterfly records that will flagged for normal verification, and a smaller number of records for some other species groups.

Communication reminders

- Don't forget that there are discussion forums for all things iRecord-related, including a forum that is available only to verifiers that can be used to discuss verification issues: https://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/forum/28
- The forums are great for seeking a wider range of opinions, but for requests for new verifiers to be set up, or for more urgent issues and reports of things not working, you can email us at irecord@ceh.ac.uk
- Steve Garland's comprehensive iRecord user guide can be downloaded from the iRecord Help pages: https://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/user-guide

Best wishes,
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on behalf of the iRecord team
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