



## **Collaboration between UK BRAG and the British Ecological Society (BES) at the BES Annual Meeting 2007.**

### **Report of special session: “Is Biodiversity Research Leading to Action?”**

The UK BRAG organised a discussion event at the British Ecological Society meeting in Glasgow, 11 September 2007. This was an interesting and lively session with about 30 people attending. The session was chaired by Dan Osborn and a Panel consisting of Peter Costigan, Ian Bainbridge and Davy McCracken addressed questions raised by the audience.

To open the session, Peter Costigan, Chair of UK BRAG, gave an introduction on the role and activities of the UK BRAG and suggested some topics for discussion. Copies of the UK BRAG summary report were available for participants. When asked, about 50% of the audience said they had heard of UK BRAG previously.

A lively Question & Answer session addressed a wide range of issues, some more relevant to UK BRAG’s activities than others. The following is an abridged account, focusing on the most relevant questions and comments (*in italics*).

#### **Discussion**

*What support might UK BRAG be able to offer to scientists undertaking reviews? (e.g. reference was made to a review of Farming & Biodiversity)*

Some of UK BRAG’s reports might be relevant to individual review topics, but their usefulness would depend on which topics have been covered by UK BRAG. Most of the focus is on cross-cutting issues which are not reflected at the HAP and SAP scale.

*There is a potential problem in that HAPs and SAPs do not pay much attention to non-native species.*

HAPs and SAPs have been effective in influencing practitioners, but we need to accept that a possible limitation is that they are not so good at dealing with negative issues such as non-natives. This is just the sort of cross-cutting issue which UK BRAG needs to address, and a report has been produced on non-native species.

*Although the UK BAP was published in 1995/6, there has been very little engagement with the BAP agenda by the Research Councils. There is a disconnect between the BAP and the academic research community.*

The Panel accept that this is an issue. UK BRAG needs to find ways to influence the spending of the Research Councils. Suggested that an effective way of influencing the Research Councils is through the UK BRAG report being used by

researchers making responsive mode bids. All researchers need to be clear on the implications of their research for practitioners. We need to have an increase in interdisciplinary research and to increase networking.

*There are opportunities to do more research at the local level, to assist in delivery of LBAP objectives. Often there was a lack of local expertise which could be helped by knowledge of technical solutions (e.g. the use of mink rafts to help water vole populations).*

This sort of topic might be relevant to UK BRAG as it fits into the category of cross-cutting research. It indicates a need for Participative and Action Research.

*Research funders need to pay for more interpretation and communication of research. How is UK BRAG trying to influence the criteria for how academics are judged. The new metrics being proposed by the RAE may make matters worse, as they will focus on input resources rather than outputs.*

*There should be a greater role of the Research Councils in bringing together research from any projects and synthesising it into useful information.*

The Panel recognise that this aspect is very important. UK BRAG should give some thought on how to take effective actions in this area. Most funders are paying more attention to interpretation and communication activities. This is a required part of Defra and SEERAD application forms, and there is growing importance of this part of the RCUK application forms.

*It is difficult to find any topic which is not also a knowledge gap. How should we prioritise? Also, how do we deal with newly emerging issues, such as policy decisions on set-aside?*

The Panel acknowledge that the structure and process of UK BRAG is more suited to addressing the more fundamental issues, but we need to explore whether and how we can make UK BRAG more responsive to more urgent issues.

*Research Councils do not give enough regard to smaller scale and more local issues such as those relating to HAPs and SAPs. Much small-scale research has been funded by Agencies and the voluntary sector, but some questions need a large amount of funding. In the research councils, more applied research has to compete against blue-skies priorities. There needs to be a closer link with the user community.*

UK BRAG can help to address this problem, by better articulating the research needs in a more co-ordinated way. Individual researchers can then use the UK BRAG reports to support their applications for Research Council funding. We need to continue to highlight those areas of research which would help to bridge the gap between academic research and the practitioner community.

*What BRAG is doing is great, but UK BRAG only addresses national issues, whereas Research Councils are often more concerned about international issues, or want arguments describing the international context.*

This is a good point. There is a close liaison between UK BRAG and the GECC-GBSC (in fact they have a shared secretariat), but we tend to have reports which are authored by UK BRAG or by GBSC rather than joint reports. We should give some thought as to how we might address this issue.

*It would be good if UK BRAG could provide advice on the opportunities for gaining biodiversity benefit on verges, and thereby influence the Highways Agency.*

This is a topic which could be considered as a future UK BRAG topic, possibly in combination with work on invasive species.

*The Irish National Platform for biodiversity research has representatives of research funding bodies involved.*

There are also members of funding bodies represented on UK BRAG, but this does not automatically lead to an appropriate funding stream. There may be benefit in closer liaison between National Platforms in different member states to compare different ways of operating and to learn from each other.

### **Summary**

This event was an invaluable opportunity for UK BRAG's profile to be raised, and to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including many unfamiliar with the Group's work. That it was able to attract a sizeable audience, while competing with numerous other events, is encouraging and demonstrates the interest in the UK BRAG from the wider community.

### **Annual Meeting 2008: Ecosystem Services – a Special Session**

In consultation with the BES, the UK BRAG has been developing ideas for a thematic session at the 2008 Annual Meeting, to be held at Imperial College London, between 5-8 September. The session is to be on Ecosystem Services.