Wyre Species Checklists - could we do better?

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The Wyre Forest Study Group (WFSG) has, over the years, collated extensive lists of many of the species to be found in the forest. But just how valuable are these lists? The presence or absence of a species is really of limited value. Could the WFSG do better?

The recent publication *The Natural History of Blenheim's High Park* (Farjon 2024) is an excellent book and provides a great summary of this important area but I found that the appended species checklists varied in the information they provided. Some were useful but others lacked basic information on the abundance at Blenheim, their habitats, or the national importance.

Our own WFSG Biological Records checklists available on our Web Pages have similar shortfalls (WFSG 2024). Could we do our checklists better? Our book on the Wyre Forest went someway to achieving this but only for a few selected species (Westwood *et al.* 2015). The WFSG REVIEW adds more, but again not everything. Records are of course available on recording systems like iRecord and Worcestershire Biological Records Centre but not everyone sends in records and the information can be limited. Having a single source annotated checklist as a reference would be so useful. Granted, with so many species found in the forest this would be a mammoth task and for some species the extra information may be of limited value, but we hold a great deal of information not available generally.

So, what is needed or desirable, possibly some sort of annotated checklists? I suggest for every species we need -

a date for the last record (or at least a time frame) - some species on our lists are no longer to be found in the forest or have not been recorded for many decades,

a frequency or abundance - is it a common species or very rare in the forest? This is really basic information,

how important is the species nationally, based on the most recent status reports,

the typical habitat, perhaps even what species was it using, tree or flower etc.; and

a common name as not everyone uses the scientific names.

Other more specific important information could be added depending on the particular group of species. I'm sure you can think of other information that could be usefully added. We could tailor the checklists to the species but make sure to keep the essential information and add only useful extras.

I would not suggest we try to provide this level of detail for every species or even groups of species, life is too short! For some species our personal information for the forest will be too limited to even attempt this, but we could consider targeted groups even within the larger Orders or Families. Some would be fairly easy such as Odonata, not many species and we should have plenty of information to populate the annotated checklist. Others that spring to mind, Squashbugs and Shieldbugs, Ladybirds, Longhorn Beetles and Orthoptera. The larger Orders need breaking down but possibly within Diptera, Hoverflies could be achievable, as could Hymenoptera, Solitary Bees *etc.* Start small and work up the groups that we have sufficient information for. No use trying to do the 2,000 or more fungi when just a small group is better, such as Boletus or Lactarius.

The work would need to be spread between group members and collated for the webpages or even a mini publication, perhaps just an online PDF file. Look at Eakringbirds (2024) for example, wonderful information here, perhaps well beyond what we might wish to achieve but surely some good ideas. This would start to form an important resource for the future. Just think how valuable good annotated checklists would be to us today if early naturalists had provided more than just species lists. Just think of future naturalists, would they appreciate just a list of species or something much more informative?

References

Eakringbirds (2024). Web pages www.eakringbirds.com/index.htm accessed 10th Nov 2024.

Farjon, A. (2024). *The Natural History of Blenheim's High Park*. Pelagic Publishing.

Westwood, B., Shirley, P., Winnall, R. & Green, H. (Eds). 2015 *The Nature of Wyre: A Wildlife-Rich Forest in the Heart of Britain*. Pisces Publications Nature Bureau.

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