**CONFIDENTIAL**

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Interviewer(s):

Respondent(s):

**INT: Okay, so the first question is, how long have you been doing any sort of biological recording? And how did you get involved in doing that?**

P07: Probably about 30 or 30 odd years, probably more than that, really. And I suppose, well, I know that I was doing it in the 1980s because that was via the surveys we were doing for our local bird club. And that would be winter, you know the winter visitors to three sites and then we do a separate sparrow recording form counting the sparrows. For example, I used to get 100 in my garden, now I get none. And we did that over, you know, that’s time series data, which I’m still collecting, not necessarily for the same sites, I do the local cemetery and my garden. But then I moved on and also collected bat data, so that would field records at first and then when I became a roost visitor, volunteer roost visitor then I would obviously record roosts. And then I joined the [citizen science programme] and did structured surveys like [NEIGHBOURHOOD] waterway survey and then I turned that into a public walk. So, I’ve been doing that for probably 15 years.

And then, so, you know, now I’ve got additional licences, I go out harp trapping bats, obviously we didn’t do it in Covid, because we’re not supposed to be in close contact. But I’m still doing remote roost visits, on Zoom links. The harp tracking, that data fed into the [wildlife project] which was run by [Name] and will continue post-Covid, [WILDLIFE CONSERVATION] have a lot stricter regulations at the moment, that we mustn’t come into close contact with bats. So, we still have casualties and we’re doing, we mask up, PPE when we’re handling bats, now.

Then, through work, I’m a member of the [ECOLOGISTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANISATION], don’t ask me what that stands for, but you’re probably familiar with it, and we have to send all our data to the local records centre as part of our code of professional conduct. So, I’ve been a member of [ECOLOGISTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANISATION] since 1990 something and I’m a full member of the [environment organisation] and we’re required to send our data in. So, it’s usually to three biological record centres, the [City] Bat Group and [City] Bat Group. So, I break it down by county and I do that every January. But this year I did it differently, last year I did it differently because we had a sync review in July, so we had some consultants come in to my borough and have a look at our local sites. There was a pressing need that the data be distributed to them in making their deliberations about the quality of our local sites.

**INT: So, what is your professional role?**

P07: I’m a field ecologist, I sometimes act as ecological consultant but I do a lot of work with community, showing people the ecological interest on their landholdings and doing all kinds of walks with the public. Sound walks and dawn chorus walks, anything that, but bat walks mostly, I suppose most people know me for, doing bat walks.

**INT: So, are you self-employed?**

P07: Yes.

**INT: Okay. Nice job.**

P07: It’s precarious, it can be quite precarious. You need to be, you know, you need to be quite brave, the weather is bad and you have to cancel everything but you know there’s always contingency, so I’ve always got a plan if I can’t do a certain job on a certain night, I can go out and look for glow worms.

**INT: Yes. Always have a backup. So, what sort of geographical area do you cover, then? Is it quite, have you got like a specific area that you like to focus your work on?**

P07: Well, it will be, obviously, my borough, [place], where I live, then I have lots of data for [Village], but I work in all the [CITY] boroughs and north [COUNTY]. When I was younger, I used to drive out further, but there’s absolutely, it’s a pointless exercise to do that because you never become familiar with the local bat communities, what to expect, you know. If you go into a new area, you could get a Barbastelle pass and you wouldn’t recognise it, you wouldn’t pick it up, much as you’d like to think that you’ve got the skills to do that, it might be just so oblique. So, I do confine myself to those areas, now.

**INT: So, it’s really kind of getting to know a particular area that sort of motivates you?**

P07: Yes, and when I see other consultants coming into my area, to do development consultancy, then I can get very annoyed with them because they are not doing their slow worm surveys, you know, they’re just looking at an urban habitat. They may come from a nice area in the countryside, Shropshire or somewhere like that, where their rates are cheaper so people bring them in from outside. Years ago, we weren’t supposed to do that but the professional body has changed its guidance on that, so, you can literally go from Scotland to do a job in London and have no local knowledge, which was something really important in the 1980s, we were even supposed to let bat groups know if we were working in our area, it was our code of conduct. Very, very big turn-around. Now, it’s all about business, it’s just business being the driver.

**INT: And, like you say, if somebody doesn’t know the area, they come and visit on one day and they don’t happen to see something and they can write that in their report.**

P07: They just put, “No further surveys.” And they’ve been on the site for two hours and of course they’ll go to [nature authoritative source], you know who I mean when I say [nature authoritative source]? And [nature authoritative source] and I have had long debates about why they even do a two-kilometre search and the data doesn’t turn up. And we had this with the slow worms, right near here, I’ve ended up putting videos on YouTube of the coils of slow worms on the local development site, because they weren’t picked up by the consultants. And I’ve had to video reference it, so just saying, “Oh, here’s coils of slow worms and hatchlings, so they’re obviously breeding, and look where we are.” And I’ve geo-referenced photographs from 2018 hasn’t been accepted over a consultant at a lower level than me who is paid to do a job and comes back and says, in January, after a two-hour visit, “There’s no slow worm.” So, I’ve gone back to [nature authoritative source] and said, “Why didn’t that come out in the search because I sent you that data?” And then we’ve had to, we’ve found a lot of pitfalls. Not their fault, not my fault, just the way getting a grid reference works, off your phone and this 100-metre squared thing, it might be over a fence and it was portioned to [COMPANY] land, not the land that was under development and they deemed that it was too far for the slow worms to travel. Well, of course, it’s not.

Yes, so it’s just a few artefacts about making the data so precise, or, you know, that crops up quite a lot and you think, I phone up [nature authoritative source] and say, “Hang on a minute, we have recorded quite rare species of bats at that location and according to my records you have that data.” And they come back and say, “Yes, but we have to prioritise.” Which means it’s in the system and they’re, you know, busy.

**INT: So, they’ve got it but they’ve not entered it into the right part of the system, yet, so it’s not coming up in the searches.**

P07: It’s in train. You know, they’ll have, I understand what they mean about priorities because, obviously, I’m one of them. They treat me really well; I’m not moaning about them. They do fantastic things, for me, they’ve done a whole bat atlas, which is the [CITY] bat atlas 2015, they did all the species maps for that and all I have to do, now, rather than justify myself when I’m responding to a development proposal, is say, “Have a look at this. Now say there’s no bat interest.”

**[0:10:10]**

**INT: Okay.**

P07: Anyway, I’m probably going off the subject.

**INT: No, so those maps, are they raw data or kind of points on a map that kind of show where species have been recorded? Or are they modelled data, the kind of habitat suitability maps?**

P07: No, they’re actual roost records and species records and they’re done for each species and they’re done in different colours for flying record, for a five years ago record, and a roost record is another colour, but it’s at a resolution that you couldn’t, obviously, pick it out. But you get some information off Magic, are you aware of that?

**INT: Yes.**

P07: We get some of our EPSM licence information off that. That disappears as well, you know, some of the licences disappear and I think people make a representation, developers go and say, “Can you take us off under the GDPR?” We’re getting a lot of GDPR stuff, at the moment.

**INT: And then they can just hide the records?**

P07: [REDACTED]

**INT: So, just going back to the beginning of your recording, you mentioned you started with birds, so what was it that, I guess, moved you from a general interest in birds to actually recording birds?**

P07: Well, it goes hand-in-hand because if you join a bird club, then a big part of their activity is common bird census. One of the common bird census data that I used and then I used it for my MSc, went back to the 1970s, so I did time series data, right through the 1990s, it was 20, nearly 30 years of data and it was amazing to be part of that and continue the common bird census, well, that’s quite a skill because you’re listening and learning birdsong. So, joining these clubs is an amazing way of building up a skillset and before you know it, you’ve got better skills. A lot of people that belong in these clubs, okay, there’s a social aspect and there’s a kind of, there’s also a lot of people I know that will then go out bird ringing, and they have got higher, greater skills than the people in these ecological consultancies. With the exception, you go to a specialised consultancy like, well, I could name a few but I won’t, but they have got the top people doing, you know, surveys for wind turbines, very targeted surveys like that. People that have got an amazing skillset, in that kind of work.

**INT: You mentioned quite a lot of different sort of motivations, there, I think. So, the social side of things the feeling like you’re part of something bigger. And then, also, I guess your data contributing to protecting the environment, as well, would you say they’re kind of your main motivations for doing any sort of recording? Or are there others and have your motivations changed over time?**

**[0:19:58]**

P07: Protecting the environment, obviously, is the strongest concern but we always find that it doesn’t work. And I often wonder what we could to improve that and that would be probably to, you know, at the moment in [Village], we’ve got some sites in the greenbelt which are under threat, which no one visits. Like some of the defunct golf courses, well, we should be out there, looking for great crested newts in the ponds. Looking to see what there is. We know that there’s things like Brown Hairstreak eggs in the blackthorn, if they’ve got that habitat, then you need to go and look for that and record it, because that’s a priority species. You know, most of the Hairstreaks are, apart from Purple Hairstreak, I think. So, it’s recording where the country’s priority species are.

And in the greenbelt, they’re here today and gone tomorrow. For example, one of our sites of metropolitan importance, that’s the term we use in [CITY], it’s more statutory, I don’t know what you would call it in [CITY], a couple of years ago I found a priority fungi which is like one of these hedgehog fungus, they’re magnificent, but hericium coralloides, and I think it’s a beach specialist, and it only grows on old trees. Now, this is a site that is owned by a certain leisure company, which I will remain nameless, and their staff get around the ancient woodland, full of orchids, was full of orchids years ago, on these tractor things, sorry, forgotten the name of them. And in that process, they destroyed, well, they moved all the lying wood out of the way, and they also took the lying wood and put it through tyres to create barriers to stop BMX riders coming on to the site. Now, all of that activity destroyed a priority fungus, because there’s no lying wood on the site now.

So, you know, some of this recording is very ephemeral, so we need to go back and see if the sites even exist. We get all this data, oh, that’s five years old, does that site even exist in [CITY]? Because a lot of our green spaces disappear overnight, the pressure of development is unbelievable.

**INT: So, how do you make decisions, then, about where you go and record? So, obviously you’ve got the structured schemes that you’re part of, which is presumably revisiting the same sites every year. But then do you do more, kind of, not ad-hoc, but recording out of those structured schemes? So, you might decide to go to a particular place and record what’s there?**

P07: The structured schemes I don’t do so much of now, so I really dropped the [citizen science programme], been catalysed by Covid, really, because usually I would do that as part of a public walk, we can’t organise public walks at the moment. I’ll probably go back to that, but the thing was, if you’re stuck on a site, doing a transect and you know there’s no bats there, why are you continuing to do that? So, a lot of these recording schemes can get very boring.

And yet we’ve got, we had a planning application for an installation in the greenbelt which was going to be lit 24 hours a day, for security, and it’s far more important for me to go and see what bats exist over there. And knowing there’s a glow worm site next to it, are there glow worms there. And then, you know, going all the way round that site, to see if there’s glow worms or bat species, we did a bit of harp trapping over there and found that we’ve got small Myotis. It’s really development led in a lot of respects.

And thinking ahead, for the future, about these greenbelt sites that are going to have a really, like a two-hour visit from a consultant saying, “Oh, there was only this, it’s low ecological value.” Nothing is low ecological value, nothing. But, that’s the problem with the way we have to evaluate things, everything is low ecological value, especially in an urban fringe, in an urban area, when it’s made ground, particularly, or if it’s covered in old farm machinery, which can have a lot of niches for all kinds of species, it’s actually a very important habitat mosaic.

**INT: So, where do you get that information from, then? Are you kind of looking at the planning applications as they come in to the local authority then you’re targeting your survey based on that?**

P07: This was yesterday’s post. The local authority send them to me. They’re not anywhere near where I live, but they know that, if I’ve got time, then I’ll take a look and see if the work is being done properly.

**INT: You’re doing that all on a kind of voluntary basis?**

P07: I didn’t hear what you said, but I think you said, “Are you doing it all off your own back?” And that is, yes, I am. But I’ll only do it if I haven’t got any work on. But I have a blog. So, I’ve kept that blog since 2010, it’s not very polished because I just have to throw things out there, but it means, it’s a point of reference, like 10 years later you can see what existed on that site, what is there now, what we’ve lost.

Yesterday I put up some information about SuDS, I would like to know, in my area, where are the SuDS, where are the swales, because we’ve got a consultant saying, “There’s clay and so swales are unsuitable.” Now, my blog post was to address that, and I sent the link to the planners so they can read it. Swales are the only thing that are going to address the biodiversity loss, a lot of mature trees, and they knew that when they did the original landscaping designs. But now they’ve removed it because they know it’s expensive, it’s unpopular with developers, they never do it properly, they only last a couple of years, people complain about rats or insects, or whatever, and so I’ve written this post to say, “Well the swales, even on clay, will attenuate water even if they won’t act as infiltration.” And I put that up as a marker, as a reminder to me, because I forget a lot of stuff, there’s a lot to remember, especially if my attention is diverted for a couple of weeks on a project or on a job, you know, that I’ve got to concentrate on. And I think, oh, better go back to that now.

And so, my blog is my first go-to place for, and my database. I use MapMate for recording, I can put that onto a spreadsheet, that can go straight to [nature authoritative source] and all the other organisations, no one has ever made any comments that they can’t use the data, they can just put it into their own systems, they used Recorder, which I find very complicated.

**INT: So, as well as the kind of planning applications prompting you to go to particular places, what else might make you think about visiting a certain place to do a survey?**

P07: Good question. So, not strictly, you might think recording a species data but for me it’s important to record habitat features and in an urban area, those habitat features, important ones, are the edgelands, have you come across [Name]? He writes a good book on that. Footpaths, public rights of way are also used by animals. So, I do a lot of campaigning around footpaths and I’m going to encourage you to perhaps buy one of my little booklets off Ebay, if you can, to support my path project, it’s £3.50 by the way. So, I’ve done a lot of work with Walking Women on Radio 4, you know, we did a lot of themes around people like [Name] who was a nature writer, the wonders of walking, keeping footpaths open. It’s not just for people, it’s for nature because they’re our wildlife corridors.

**[0:29:57]**

Our wildlife corridors, now, are being infilled, our rivers are being developed with tower blocks for the wealthy, overseas as well, not just for local people, there’s no affordable housing in a lot of these tower blocks, they’re advertised in Malaysia and Singapore, can send you the links to prove that. So, our footpaths, which wealthy people on [BOROUGH] are trying to close some of them because they’re citing antisocial behaviour, or people going to the toilet down there, but really, they’re using it to put all their junk, they’re having new extensions and they’re putting all their rubbish there, but if you actually go and walk these footpaths, you’ll find badger foraging. And how do badgers move in the city? For goodness’ sake! They can’t be breeding with their brothers and their sisters, the population is going to die out, they’re really, really squeezed in [BOROUGH] at the moment, there’s a lot of badger disturbance, blocking of setts. They’ve not been picked up in a development because the consultants will only survey the red line. Do you know the difference between a redline plan and a blueline plan?

**INT: No.**

P07: Okay. So, I own a piece of land and I want to build an extension and I need planning permission. So, I submit the redline plan to the local authority and they say, “We want you to do a survey.” And so, you survey within the redline plan but that is not all my landholding, so the blueline plan is all my landholding and planning consultants have been telling people to make that redline plan as small as possible. And that is ridiculous because the whole site is not getting looked at. Now, the council have just done this, and I’m meeting a councillor this afternoon to discuss this with them about. So, there is a badger sett in the blueline area, in that landholding, but the actual consultants were stopped from surveying, but it’s their foraging area, so they probably found a lot of grubbed up lawn but they cut the lawn in half because this block of apartments will stop at that, you know, mid-point in the lawn, which is council owned land, but it’s the foraging area for badgers. Where the hell are they going to go? How are they going to move around the site? They haven’t been picked up in the survey.

So, this is probably coming from planning consultants, saying, “Make the redline plan as small as you possibly can,” and then the impact zone is not being picked up. Now, the impact zone can go far beyond the blueline, especially if it’s floodlighting for a tennis court or something like that. But I’ve made representations to my professional body about this and I don’t care who knows about that they disagreed with me because I’ve said, where the impact zone is not being assessed, we’re supposed to do that in an EcIA, ecological impact assessment, but because if you’ve got floodlights, it’s actually illegal to light a bat roost. But how do you know if there’s even a bat roost there, if you’re not going to survey 30 metres from your lighting column, and of course that’s the area, the zone of impact. We are going backwards. So, we need to make our data pick this up because just doing this [citizen science programme] for BCT is good prime series data, it’s good for people to cut their teeth and learn about monitoring but it restricts us from learning things about the wider environment.

**INT: And so, when you go to a site, are you, is it always the kind of same set of species that you’re looking for? Or is it, I mean it sounds like you’ve got skills right across the board in terms of identification, are you kind of going to a site and thinking, right, well what are the species that are going to be here? And you’re looking for priority species rather than kind of thinking, I’m going to go and I’ll do a full list of everything that I see.**

P07: Yes, priority species are going to save the site in increasing mitigation, so, but I’m no good at invertebrates. And of course, you know, that’s quite ranging when you think about the saproxylic being destroyed by HS2, for example. We’ve got a site where, at [SITE], it’s called, which has got communities of jet ant, which is a saproxylic ant, it’s a beautiful ant with a heart-shaped head, but a little bit larger than, you know, most ants. And they’ve got a beautiful ecology and lifecycle. Well, if I started talking about those to most people, they’d laugh their socks off if I tried to discuss that with a planner. So, you know, or even an ecologist. What the hell is she on about? Jet ant. You know, it’s a very specialised, but it is the invertebrates that we should be conserving, they’re the most important, they’re the building blocks.

That’s the importance about SuDS, if you’ve got the regeneration of a council estate that was once a glorious, broadleaf woodland with lots of grass verges, with loads of buttercups and dandelions and daisies, you’ve got a fantastic, sustainable, gorgeous parkland, which is a proper habitat and then you’re going to turn it into this pseudo, kind of developer’s speak landscape that is multi-use, multi-purpose and just helps you pack in great numbers of people. Then, swales are the only thing that are going to generate insect food, insect prey for birds, even sparrows that are seed eaters, need insects when they’re feeding their young. It’s just, sorry, I’ve lost sight of your question, again.

**INT: It’s okay. So, what motivates you to kind of keep going because it sounds a bit**

**Audio ends: [0:37:12]**