**CONFIDENTIAL**

Date Transcribed: 25th May 2021

Interviewer:

Respondent:

**INT: Okay. So my first question is, how long have you been any sort of recording? And how did you start?**

P27: Well now then there’s a question. I would say probably, I’ve had a lifelong interest in wildlife. My background professionally is horticulture. And as a profession I’ve been in horticulture all of my life. Came from a family business growing a wide variety of different things. My mother always had an interest in wild flowers. When I was a kid, you know, we’d put monkey nuts out for the birds and one or two other bits and pieces. So, you know, it sort of sparked a bit of an interest there. And just got interested in bird watching. And then when I started working full time, horticulture doesn’t leave you an awful lot of time for hobbies. So I always tried to manage to get a little bit in. And then going from more manual work, working in a nursery and garden centre, I went on the road repping. Probably, well about the late ‘80s. And moved over to [COUNTY] from just outside [CITY]. And suddenly found I’d got more free time of a weekend. And saw a small piece in the [newspaper] about volunteering at [wildlife charity] at [PLACE]. Got involved with the volunteer group that was at that time run by Drs [Name] and [Name] <name 0:02:07>. They had a little management committee. I got invited onto the management committee. And eventually after a period of time as they were getting older, they were already getting into their 80s, they wanted to hand it on. And I took on the role of chair at the reserve there. And we had quite a considerable programme of volunteer work. But one of the things I picked up on doing it, and you know [Nature reserve] was very much my passion for a long time, was actually trying to sort out the records to some extent. Of course, I mean if you know the site it’s part of [PLACE] SSSI. It sits directly below the [PLACE] which of course you can see from 50 miles or more away. You can see it from the Pennines. You’ve got the [PLACE] when you’re looking up, coming up from [City] you see the [PLACE]. But it’s [unclear: 00:03:07] at the [PLACE], you can see the [PLACE]. And the [PLACE] is actually part of [wildlife charity] and the [PLACE] sits directly below it. Its main interest from a status point of view was its geological, because of its glacial moraine and one thing and another. And you’ve got this beautiful lake which has got some quite rare plants in it. [Lake], [Nature reserve] itself is a mixture of tumble and boulders. And woodland in various stages of development, quite acid woodland and so on. And I just started going round to different types of birds obviously to start with, trying to do a bit more with wild flowers. Because people would come and record in the area. But actually narrowing down to what was actually in the reserve itself was sometimes a little difficult. Because you’d get things like marsh violet recorded which didn’t actually grow in the wood but was growing down by [Lake]. And <name 00:04:13>, the tufted <name>. And so trying to split things out a little bit. And then I had a bit of a spell of trying to get into the wonderful world of fungi. Just recording, trying to get records together for the reserve. And just to broaden my own knowledge really as much as anything. And I got reasonably good but I didn’t get into using the microscope. So that was limiting a little bit. But I did learn quite a lot. And then [Lake] itself is a water body so obviously it attracted dragonflies. And I had a friend at the time who, we ended up starting to travel to twitch basically dragonfly or butterfly species around the UK, to try and get to see all the UK species. And we’d go on, well you know some quite longish jaunts to different parts of the country for the day. And it just grew from there. And I got involved with the [CONSERVATION CHARITY]. And then took on the role of the recorder for the [CONSERVATION CHARITY]. And I am actually recorder for two Vice-Counties. And I have been now for quite a few years. Probably getting on for oh golly, it must be 25 years plus I would think.

**INT: Wow.**

P27: No maybe not quite that long. Certainly about 20 years. And they have gone through different recording software programmes to achieve that. And they now, as you possibly know, use iRecord. They were one of the first natural history societies I think to get involved with iRecord because they were in need of a replacement, a much better software than what they were using, which was ADDIT site I think it was called. Which was computer based software, whereas of course iRecord is server based isn’t it. It’s all internet based. And so I’ve been recording and have very much enjoyed chasing around looking at [s/l: ponds 0:06:53] and recording what’s there. And it’s just, you know, we go all round [COUNTY] through the summer, obviously have our favourite places. And of course when people like to go out, they like to go to places to record. This is one of the problems isn’t it, where they’re going to see plenty, getting people to go to places- Some of these places you don’t know till you actually do get there. So it’s- But along the way in all this, being involved with local natural history societies I started to get involved a little bit with going to one or two moth trapping sessions. And so we eventually, myself and my wife, we got a moth trap. And we’re not ardent ‘mothers’. We just, that’s been more casual. And so we do that, we put them, the trap out when we think the weather’s going to be half decent, suitable, and we might be get a good catch. And we go through it, we put it out a few times a year. And so we record. And all those records going to [NAME] who is the [VICE COUNTY] recorder. And I actually put them on iRecord. But then have to send in them separately because at the moment they are very much MapMate based. I think they are starting to use iRecord a bit more. A lot of the ‘mothers’ don’t like it. But I mean from my point of view, in verifying dragonfly records, I think it’s great. Obviously if you got records to verify which you haven’t got an image for, and you don’t know the recorder, it can be difficult to assess whether what the recording sometimes is accurate. But you have to make a judgement. And fortunately iRecord is very in that it gives you the option, certainly within the part of it I use, is you’ve got the option to accept if it’s correct. Accept if as plausible. Or even reject it. So you’ve got the various options. So I like it a lot. And you know, I verify all the records for both [VICE COUNTY] and [VICE COUNTY] that are entered into iRecord. And that now includes records from the, oh, [WILDLIFE CHARITY] garden bird watch. Because they now record other species as well, all those records get inputted. But yes, so I, you know, and I mean in terms of places to go, I mean from my point of view at the moment there’s quite a lot going on in terms of species moving north and colonising new sites. So you’ve got species like the willow emeralds, which have just occurred started to appear in [COUNTY] in the last year or so.

**[00:10:01]**

Small red eyed damselfly has been moving through the county over the last 10 years or more. And so there is a bit of a focus on things like that. But I’m also involved with- the [woodland organisation] have got a beaver project which you may know about at the [SITE]. It’s part of flood alleviation scheme for [TOWN], rather than using these, they put a series of not dams, but initially, or flood barriers in along various rivers, which I mean normally would just flow under it. But if the water levels went up, it was a way of containing, containment barriers sort of thing. But they’re in a position where they were deteriorating. And they saw beavers and their dam building expertise as being a way of holding back water without the need to maintain artificial barriers. And [Name] <name 0:11:09> at [woodland organisation] asked me to- you know because they’re looking at all recording from where they’ve put the beavers enclosure in. And so we, I go up there two or three times in the summer now and record there to see if we can see what changes is happening in terms of those ponds. And they’re making a fantastic job, or making superb ponds.

**INT: Are they.**

P27: And so it’s exciting to go and see and see how it changes. And generally the beaver pond pools are considered extremely good for dragonflies. So you know, it’s what drives me of a weekend to get out there when the sun is shining.

**INT: So is it, sorry, dragonflies that’s your main passion then? And your main recording?**

P27: Dragonflies that’s my main passion, that’s what we record mainly. We do look at other things along the way. I have to say I always plan to record butterflies as well when we’re out and about. And I might write a few down. But when it comes to actually entering the records, it always gets left and forgotten. [laughs] 9 times out of 10. Unless I come across anything specific which is of interest. And quite often that’s actually more day flying moths based than butterflies, because a lot of people go out and record butterflies. And I do stuff which helps them because we’ve got, I’m involved with a project up at [reservoir] which is a redundant reservoir, the water level was lowered, they seeded the banks. It’s still owned by [WATER COMPANY]. They seeded the banks, they’ve got quite nice meadow areas developing. And I saw that, I was going up there recording dragonflies was one of the reasons for going. And we found that there was a good colony of dingy skipper had developed on there, and a few other species, common blue butterfly and so on and so forth. But then it was all starting to scrub up with larch from the surrounding forestry plantation. Asked [WATER COMPANY] about that. And they weren’t going to do anything about it. They were just going to leave it to be wild. So we’ve actually got a management project going up there now. [WATER COMPANY] have agreed to it. They’re keen to do more. And so we’ve actually had some volunteer groups up there and done some scrub control. And that will keep it much more open and will help with diversity in the flora and obviously the insect species that go with it. And the dragonfly population up there is doing quite nicely. That’s developing as well.

**INT: And is that you having personal conversations with the landowners then to say-**

P27: Yes. Yes. So, and that’s a site where just by chance we recorded argent and sable. And it’s one of the only a few sites in [COUNTY] where the species [unclear: 0:14:19]. [woodland] was the mainstay one, and there’s the forestry, not in actually [reservoir], but surrounding woodland which is managed by the [woodland organisation] is good for argent and sable which is quite rare now in [COUNTY].

**INT: Okay. Is this [woodland] down near [TOWN]?**

P27: Yes.

**INT: Okay. Yes. I was thinking about that the other day. Because I did some of my, the field work for my PhD in there, on speckled wood butterflies.**

P27: Oh right.

**INT: And I was thinking I’ve not been down there for so long it would be lovely to go back.**

P27: Well apparently there was a post on the Facebook group either yesterday or the day before. I think they’ve done quite a lot of felling work at [woodland] taking quite a lot of the plantation conifer woodland out and they’re replanting with much more mixed deciduous woodland.

**INT: Yes, yes. It’s a nice site.**

P27: But I mean argent and sable is a birch specialist, it likes small birch. So you need to have a, you know, a continual development of young birch trees within the woodland area to ensure that that thrives. And there’s quite a lot of that up at [VILLAGE]. And as I say, we just came across them by chance. And I got [Name] of the [WILDLIFE CHARITY] involved, he’s been up there and done a little bit of conservation work up there. And [WILDLIFE CHARITY] know about it. And so it’s more regularly monitored. And the [woodland organisation] have it mapped now. So you know it’s bits like that that draw my- And this last year we went up, I went up with the guy who is with [WATER COMPANY], he works at [reservoir]. But he was tasked at looking at sort of potentially putting in management plans for quite a lot of the [WATER COMPANY] sites. And when we were up there, we found a clearwing moth which again is very under-recorded in [COUNTY]. We only saw it very fleetingly. But we believe it was large red belted clearwing. So I’ve got a lure, a pheromone lure this year. So we’re going to go and sit up round the reservoir in May and June and see if we can find a few more and get some decent photos of one of them. Get a more just definite record in. I mean a lot of these things just go under the radar because, you know, recordings all about, you’re going out there and it’s partly knowing what to look for isn’t it as much as anything else. And a lot of these things can be just by chance. So, you know, it’ll be good to know- And again, that’s a birch specialist. So but I think it’s a more southerly species which has been moving north. But if you go on the [COUNTY] moths site, I think there’s only a handful of records on for [COUNTY]. But at the moment they’ve had trouble uploading more recent records. So I think it stops at about 2014. But even so, I don’t think there’s that many records you know, past that date for this part of the world. So to get some more definite ones. Because as I say, we only caught a fleeting glimpse. And we sort of deduced that that’s what the species was rather than actually having a really good sighting of one. So yes.

**INT: So when you’re planning your weekend trips out then, what- I mean it sounds like you have lots of different reasons that you might make a visit somewhere. What are the kind of things that you’re considering? Is it the species or the site? Or something else that kind of is the main driver?**

P27: It’s, well in some cases it’s exploring a new site. So obviously you don’t know what you’re going to find. In other cases it’s that you go to some, probably your more preferred sites because it’s good to see on a year to year basis how stuff is doing. You know, we haven’t been out up to now. But I think this weekend if the weather continues good we will go to [Village]. And that’s a good site for getting early records of large red damselfly. Which is the first to emerge. There are one or two records starting to come in, I noticed [NAME] in [COUNTY] had had one the other day. And we’ve had large red damselfly around the 8th or 9th April in previous years. This year because the conditions are, you know, the cold temperatures, I mean insect activity is starting to improve. And we’ve seen one or two green-veined-whites today, butterflies out. And it’s just a case of a nice sheltered pond, with the warmth in the day, and it gets, you know, get some sunshine, and there might just be a chance. So we just like to try and get one or two first records in, see how it varies from year to year. I mean ideally you should be going on a day to day basis to get a true picture from each season to season. But that’s not possible. We just have to go at the moment when we can until I get to the point where I can retire and I can go more when I want to go, rather than be you know, at the end of each week.

**[00:20:06]**

And the other, the thing about that is, is a bit of competitive, because [reservoir] is usually one of the first sites to bring a record in for [COUNTY]. And it’s nice to occasionally get, you know, get it tweeted out there that we’ve got a record before they have.

**INT: [laughs]**

P27: But you know, it is interesting to see how it can vary. Because you know, April 9th is probably about the earliest we’ve had. But in most years it’s usually towards the end of the month before we start to see records coming in. Last year was difficult because of course everybody was under lockdown, and you know, I was having to- I managed to cycle to one or two sites locally. But didn’t manage to cycle as far as [Village].

**INT: No, no.**

P27: So, but you see we’ve done work there as a result of being involved with the recording. There’s an area that’s leased by the [woodland organisation] just outside the military training area.

**INT: [Nature Reserve]?**

P27: [Nature Reserve], you know it?

**INT: Yes. Yes.**

P27: Yes I mean [Name] set up- I mean because he, both he and I go to the [Village] Comms meetings. And do you know [Name] from the [CONSERVATION CHARITY]?

**INT: I don’t know her but yes, I know of her, yes.**

P27: I mean with her and [CONSERVATION CHARITY], you know, we started doing quite a bit of birch control on [Nature Reserve] because the grazing regime there isn’t working, it isn’t keeping the scrub under control. And the initial concern was that it would all just scrub up and it would lose what had been gained. I mean it was all, that was all originally plantation woodland at one point in time. So it has improved a lot over what it was originally. But you know, it was just going and recording and then realising and then pushing various buttons with various people in various places to try and get things done. And we’ve had you know, got some work done there. And we need to do a bit more. I mean bracken’s the next thing that needs controlling. Because you take the scrub cover out and of course the bracken starts to come in. But you know, that’s coming up trumps. I mean it’s a great site for quite a variety of butterflies. Marbled white is on there. The small copper, I think there’s one or two dingy skippers, not very many, common blue. But quite a good [over-talking: 00:22:46]

**INT: It must be quite nice seeing that.**

P27: Sorry?

**INT: What was that sorry?**

P27: You know moths as well as the butterflies. And of course if you know [Name] who is at [CITY], I mean he’s the one now with [NAME] stepping back a little bit, he’s the one now driving the dark bordered beauty, the surveying and all the work that’s being done on that. Which is a bit of a roller coaster ride I think because they seem to have some success and then, was it last year or the year before, it dropped off again. So-

**INT: I think it, yes, I don’t think I saw the numbers from last year. I think it was the year before when it really dipped down again. And they were really low numbers I think the year before. But yes I don’t know. I don’t know if they even managed to any recording last year.**

P27: No I don’t, well yes, I mean by July-

**INT: It’s [unclear: 0:23:37] isn’t it so-**

P27: They should have been okay. I think they did. I think they did. But it wasn’t, it wasn’t as bad as it had been. But it still wasn’t fantastic. So it’s a difficult one isn’t it. You’ve got know much about what the requirements are to try and- You know, the management is so difficult. You need the creeping willow obviously because that’s the food plant. But then you’ve got to have the grazing regime right, and obviously I think you need some grazing. But I think the trouble was the sheep were coming on a bit early and they were nibbling all the growth off. And if the eggs had been laid on that growth, it’s like farmers hedge trimming isn’t it?

**INT: Yes.**

P27: You know [Name] has been putting some good posts out during lockdown on the Facebook group about various species across [COUNTY]. And he was saying about some species, the way that they’d declined. And they reckoned it was down to hedge trimming taking the eggs, the larvae, or the pupae off, so that the moths were in decline because of the way the hedges were being trimmed these days. So yes, so I float in various circles.

**INT: Yes. Yes.**

P27: I enjoy recording, but I also like to think that we can you know, we can do more to it by just getting out there and seeing things, you can spark things which help sites and help conservation in general at some of these places.

**INT: Is that your main motivation then do you think? Is it the kind of action that the records lead to?**

P27: Yes. Yes. I would agree with that yes. To find something and then be able to do something more about it to encourage the landowners or whoever to you know, take action to say, well there you know you’ve got something of value here. And try and encourage where it’s necessary to do something more about it.

**INT: And so you’ve obviously got your kind of familiar sites that you like to go to. And then you said that you have, you like to explore new places as well. How do you kind of find those places to go to?**

P27: Sometimes by word of mouth from other people. Or just by basically getting ordnance survey up on my computer and looking around and looking seeing where the ponds are, and seeing whether there’s any access. I mean there’s big areas of northwest [COUNTY] I haven’t ventured into. I just don’t have time. And you know, some of it’s, I’m trying to encourage other people to record, put the records on, I can then verify. And then if they find anything interesting and you go and investigate it a bit further. It’s like there was a guy up at, up towards the northern end of the county, [Name], and he’s a bird watcher. And he found that there was a site, a quarry site up near [TOWN] which he was recording, he was finding red-veined darters on, which is very much a migrant species, it isn’t really established as a- Well there’s one or two sites where it seems to breed reasonably regular. But it’s more a southern European species. And I think it’s still generally perhaps a bit cold for it in the UK. And then finding small red-eyed damselflies up there and as a result of that, I ended up finding another site up there, and went to it last year and it was absolutely heaving with small red-eyed damselflies. So that is one that has, you know, you go back a few years and it was very much in the south of [COUNTY]. And now it’s right the way through and it’s even spread up into Durham. So you know, you can find out quite a lot. And that’s, at the moment with sites like that, I’ve just been recording. In fact they don’t need anything too fantastic. They just like a nice weedy pond with lots of stuff floating on the surface to which to sit out on.

**INT: So when you’re observing species like that, are you looking at how they’re interacting with their habitats as well to understand what the requirements are? Are you getting that information from other sources?**

P27: Some and some I would say. I mean it’s helpful to have an understanding. I mean if you look at the number of dragonfly I’ve got, I’ve got plenty of those. And so you know, to know the basics of what the requirement is for the species. But then when you go out and you record, you learn an awful lot more about what they’re like. I mean the one side of it I do tend to be not as good as I should be, which is absolute proof of breeding, of course is to find the exuviae of the larvae. Because that means then it had a complete life cycle. And I do collect a few larvae, exuviae sorry. But I’m a bit time limited very often. And searching for larvae can be a right pain, and you can search ages and not find anything. And then you suddenly find a hotspot where there’s quite a few. But you know, where I can. But you know I make sure that when we record, I record all the other activities, so if there’s any copulation or any egg laying activity going on. Or there’s emergent, because if you find an emergent then they’re more than likely coming out from that site. And so you’ve got more or less 100% proof of breeding. So and that’s the same with a lot of people who record dragonflies. People love to go out and see the insects flying. But collecting little brown exoskeletons is not everybody’s cup of tea. But I do it. And if I had more time I would probably do it more.

**INT: And does that level of detail get passed on? So when you pass your records on to the national scheme, can you pass that kind of information on as well?**

P27: What the-?

**INT: About the kind of behaviour or that you’ve found different life stages? Or that kind of thing?**

**[00:30:01]**

P27: Well the recording, we have a special, within iRecord we have a special recording page. And iRecord now has for various groups set up specific recording platforms, whatever you want to call it. And so rather than use the standard iRecord page, I go to the [CONSERVATION CHARITY] one.

**INT: Okay, yes.**

P27: And that allows you to record adults, cop pairs, [unclear: 0:30:42], emergent, and the exuviae.

**INT: Okay.**

P27: And larvae. So you can actually record all the main parts of activity fairly simply. And you can put a quantity in. You can do it as a fixed number, or the [CONSERVATION CHARITY] actually like to use a scale. So it might just be an individual. Or it’s 2 to 5 I think it is, 6 to 20 and so on and so forth. And to be honest, when you’re recording it, you know with insects like that flying around, actually trying to get a fixed number is extremely difficult. And probably for every that you see you’ve missed two somewhere. So and as far a I’m concerned is, is it gives a good idea. And within different species you know that, I mean damselflies you’re going to find possibly like common blue damselflies you might find by the hundreds. But brown hawkers you’re only going to find in the 10s or 20s maybe at most at any one particular site. But and then you know, just trying to make sure I record as much as possible any breeding evidence.

**INT: And do you make your records straight away after a visit? Or do you kind of save all that up and do it in the winter?**

P27: I tend to save it up and do it in the winter.

**INT: Yes.**

P27: [laughs]

**INT: I don’t blame you. [laughs] You’ve got to make sure you make good notes in the field.**

P27: Well yes, I mean the main thing is recording, you know, I try, I just try and make sure I record what breeding activity I see. And an overall number of adults. And just score it down the page like that. If there’s anything very specific that I think needs entering straight away I will put it on. But no, it tends to get left to the darker nights of winter to do it.

**INT: [laughs] And when you go to a site are you making a full list of everything that you see in terms of the dragonflies?**

P27: Yes.

**INT: Is it all- is it a full list of everything?**

P27: And I mean there is a tick box actually on the [CONSERVATION CHARITY] form as well when you enter the records, they actually ask you, did you record everything that you saw at that site?

**INT: Okay, yes.**

P27: So and in general I tend to look to record everything. There’s very occasionally I’ll go to a site, if it’s very focused- Like on willow emerald at the moment, if you’re very focused on searching for one specific variety, then you would probably not record everything that you saw on that particular visit. You know and that particularly, and we’ve doing that because they’ve occurred at- They were picked up at [SITE] two years ago. And so this last year the challenge was to go back and find them again. And they were found at two particular spots at the site. And one or two other people from the [Town] area have been there and been recording as well, and eventually they managed to find a copper and recorded a female egg laying as well. So they’re actually establishing as a breeding species in [COUNTY]. It’s one that’s widespread across Europe. But that’s one that’s moved up relatively quickly through the UK. It’s quite unique because it egg lays into the woody stems of overhanging branches of trees. And then the larvae hatch and drop into the water.

**INT: Yes, okay. So it sounds like you’ve kind of got a good social network as well in the dragonfly world. Is that-**

P27: Yes, well we have- I mean [NATURAL HISTORY GROUP] has it’s own Facebook group. We have a core of people, I currently chair the [NATURAL HISTORY GROUP] and we hold, we hold a couple of almost like committee meetings a year. And we plan out our activities for the season, which is usually just involving a few meetings outdoors. But we try and get involved in, you know, there’s quite a demand these days to have wildlife groups and organisations occur at open gardens. Or the [festival] at [City] for example, you know, we’ve had a stand there now for the last well I don’t know, maybe four, five events that have been held at the museum. And so we do, you know, we make the effort to get out and promote as well. And you build up a network of people. So, which is useful because it helps to bring- Because you can’t, physically get everywhere through the season. You know, particularly with the vagaries of the British weather, you know, trying to plan it. And I always tend to find with work is it’s glorious all week and you get to the weekend and it’s- [laughs]

**INT: [laughs] Yes. So you have quite a good network of people that you could say to, can you visit this site this year?**

P27: I wouldn’t say I’ve a huge network. But I certainly have people in one or two places who I encourage to send me- If they don’t want to put them on iRecord themselves, to at least send me the records. I mean the guy out at [Town], [Name], he’s keen. And he’s been following it up on [SITE] and so on and so forth. And so I don’t need to go out there quite as often as I would perhaps otherwise. But and there’s various people know me. And if they find anything a bit different you know, it might come across on Twitter or on fortunately on the Facebook group. And if I need someone to pick up on it from there I will do. But there’s certainly room for more recording in [COUNTY]. You know, trying to get more people involved, it’s not always easy. And of course with what’s been going on over the last 12 months or so, I think you know, our members of the group have dropped off. Which is a bit of a shame. But I think that’s possibly the same with a lot of organisations at the minute, because people’s focus has been elsewhere. Although in saying that of course people have been focused on their gardens and wildlife at home haven’t they to a large extent.

**INT: Yes. It’s been a mix I think hasn’t it of some people kind of engaging a lot more with nature wherever that may be, probably in their gardens, or in their local patch. But then like you say some organisations have suffered because some people have not had the time to think about other things unfortunately. So yes, but for those people that have kind of newly entered, or revived an interest in wildlife, you wonder if that will continue, and whether that enthusiasm can be maintained in the long run.**

P27: Yes absolutely. Once they get- I mean the danger is as they become more diverted back into their other activities, then things will fade away a little bit. But being involved with horticulture we know for a fact that, I mean the gardening centres, just absolutely booming at the moment. Yes, I mean okay, Brexit had an impact in that perhaps there aren’t as many plants coming in from Europe. But that aside is, we do quite a lot of business with a mail order company. They seem to be piling in the orders left, right and centre. And of course the weather’s good again at the moment, although we’ve got frost in the night, the weather’s pretty good. So it’s nice for gardening. And I think you know, it’s people are still restricted to a large extent. So they’re still out there, they’re still doing things locally in the environment. You know there was quite a lot of people put wildlife ponds in. We’re still in the throws of trying to get the garden sorted out to a point where we can have a wildlife pond in. Terrible isn’t it, I should have a pond, and I haven’t.

**INT: [Laughs] Yes.**

P27: We had one in a very shady position which didn’t acquire much of anything. So that’s come out. But as soon as we get a chance there’ll be one going in. But so yes.

**INT: And so as county recorder do you do anything in terms of producing atlases and things like that as well?**

P27: We, excuse me- I’ve got something a little stronger than your glass.

**INT: Yes, I’m jealous. [laughs]**

**[00:40:00]**

P27: We’ve, no, we haven’t actually gone down that route. [Name] who was recorder for [VICE COUNTY], or [VICE COUNTY], he produced an atlas for that vice-county a few years ago. We have talked about it. But I physically don’t, mentally just haven’t felt I’ve got the time or the wherewithal to do it. I only could consider doing it maybe once I retire which is hopefully not too long off. But I haven’t done so at the moment no.

**INT: So when you’re kind of encouraging people to go to particular places, it’s not about filling a square on a map. It’s more about targeting a particular site that you might think is of interest.**

P27: Well no it is, it is, it’s both, because I mean what has happened is, is the [CONSERVATION CHAIRTY] itself had an atlas project, which was between 2008 and 2013. So it was five years of recording. And considerable effort and they promoted and the local recorders promoted. And you know, we were putting the message up here in [COUNTY] encouraging people to go out and record. And then in 2013 they produced an atlas for the whole of the UK. And then more recently, in fact, the latest has not been published, and that’s probably partly as a result of Covid. But there was another, two year project which was [project Name] which was I think 2018 to 2020. But nothing, I’ve not seen anything published as regards to an update over the original atlas. But that was one where we’d no sooner published the atlas and you know, there was some of the erythromma, the red-eyed species were popping up in new places in [COUNTY]. So you know-

**INT: Out of date as soon as it’s published.**

P27: Yes absolutely. Yes. Yes. So not on a local level I haven’t no. We’ve talked about it but nobody’s quite had the drive or the means to do it. But certainly we’ve had, you know, input into a national one, which to my mind is to some extent more important. But it might be something I’d look at going forward when I’ve got more time and if I’m off all the time in the winter, maybe to put the effort in.

**INT: And then do you get any feedback, so in terms of obviously that data’s used like you say, to produce a national atlas. Do you get any other feedback about how that data is used at a national level in terms of producing trends or looking at-**

P27: Not particularly no. No. Not that I can think of off the top of my head, no.

**INT: And would you kind of like that feedback? Or, you know are there things that you would like the data to be used for?**

P27: [CONSERVATION CHARITY] is limited in its resources. It’s still a relatively small organisation. They have a conservation officer, an outreach officer. And they do well for the size of the membership that there is. But they have been very focused on collecting data on species which are of more concern in terms of the populations in the UK. And that being in the last year or so, <name 00:44:14> species in particular. So gomphid, we only had one gomphid species which is the common clubtail which occurs not in [COUNTY], so we can’t be involved with that particularly on a local level. It’s a species that thrives in the river systems of the [RIVER] and the [RIVER] and the [RIVER]. And various tributaries and others, I think the [RIVER] as well I think in [REGION] is another river where there’s a population. And there was quite a push to explore long stretches of those rivers to establish whether they still had strongholds. And you know, they found there were certain areas where they were known to be, which they now seem to be less so, or have become extinct. But there was other areas where they found populations that they didn’t know were there. So that was some very detailed mapping was done on that. And more recently I think they followed that up with the white-legged damselfly which is a species which will also occur in the same habitat. And they’ve had projects on the southern damselfly which is rare in the UK, down on the south coast. And over in South Wales I think as well. Because we’re up to now we’ve- I mean even though we’ve got new species colonising, we haven’t got anything that’s particularly rare [unclear: 0:45:48] species. But we certainly if, if there was a project going which involved, you know, something that like maybe if they decided to do something on golden ring dragonfly, something like that. And of course [COUNTY], and the [REGION] are areas where they will hold populations. And I always try and make the effort to you know, it’s always good to find out where they’re occurring. So we could do-

**INT: So you would be willing to act on those kind of requests to visit particular places if it was for a-**

P27: Oh yes, yes yes. Yes. Yes.

**INT: And would it be searching for a particular species that you would be most interested in?**

P27: Not necessarily no. No. No, I mean to my mind going to a site and just finding a rich diversity is the sign of a good healthy environment. And that’s what I like to see. That’s what really gets me is being there and- It’s not just being one species necessarily. But it’s being, you know, if there’s- the site is able to sustain a wide diversity which you know, it’s rich in flora and fauna overall isn’t it on that basis. So it’s probably premium habitat. And that’s something which is, you know, becoming rarer.

**INT: And would you be less interested in going to somewhere that’s not of particular interest but just because it’s somewhere that there’s a gap in the records?**

P27: I would, yes well I mean I have in the past. We have done that. We’ve tried to fill some of the gaps in. It’s just having the time to get out and do it. But I have, in the past I have made the effort to get out into certain areas and look, just pick a water body and just go and look and try and get a feel for what’s there. And then if you find it’s looking like it might be quite good, then go back again. You know with certain sites you’ve got to go two to three times in the season really to get a picture of what the actual dragonfly formula would be at a site. So you’d go in late May, early June time perhaps as a starting point. By which time you should have any of the early spring emergent species on the wing. Go back a month or six weeks later, and then you know, towards the end of the summer as well, which should make sure that you pick up all the different times of emergents, and have a chance of finding the different species. So as I say, you know, you can, if it’s worthwhile you’ll go back and record more. But if you find there’s very little there, then you possibly wouldn’t go back that regularly. But you never know with a site do you really. It’s always worth a pop in from time to time. But it’s all time. You know it’s, this is having been to various [NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY] meetings and you know, where they’ve talked about recording in general at those, is the distribution of a certain rare species in the UK limited by other facts, of the number of recorders that have actually gone out and they’ve just gone to their favourite places and recorded it there. [laughs]

**INT: Yes, almost certainly.**

P27: You know, which is going to be in a lot of cases isn’t it. I mean a lot of naturalists like to go to the places where there’s a richness of diversity and record at those sites. But you know you need to get out and do more. I mean [NAME], oh what’s his last name? There was a guy, he worked for the national park. Is it [Name]?

**INT: I don’t know.**

P27: He’s recently been out, I think he’s trying to do a Masters.

**[00:50:00]**

And as part of that he’s been out an he’s been looking for small eggar moths webs in the hedgerows. And he’s recorded, he’s been- He has an area up round somewhere round [TOWN] area, somewhere round up there. And you know, he’s, if you go out there and look, and he’s recorded a lot. He’s found us a good population up in that area just by the fact he’s gone out there and looked for it and recorded it. And put the hours in to just go round and look a site, various sites and various hedgerows and what have you. So yes.

**INT: It does give you a bit of hope doesn’t it to think actually that once you start looking for things you do find them.**

P27: Yes absolutely.

**INT: I find it gives me a bit of hope anyway to think there are things there when you start to look. It can get a bit gloomy sometimes can’t it I think the world of thinking about wildlife and conservation and the state of the environment. And it’s nice to hear the stories of people that go out and look for things and find them.**

P27: Well we went to this, you probably can’t see that clearly, but the picture on the wall behind me if a site called [Name] which is in Brazil.

**INT: Oh wow.**

P27: Went in December 2019. So really it was just before the pandemic. And it is, [Name] is Reserva Ecológica de Guapiçu. And it’s basically it was farmland. It’s part of the Mata Atlântica which is the Atlantic rainforest of which oh something ridiculous like 90% has been lost. This site is about an hour and a half out of Rio. So we flew into Rio and then drove into the foothills of these mountains. And in a space of 20 years, they’ve turned farmland into absolutely superb. You want to Google it. You want to Google it. There’s 400 and odd bird species present there. Dragonfly species, there’s a guy gone out there, a Dutchman called [NAME], who is, he works for the Dutch civil service, foreign overseas. But in his spare time he’s got himself involved because he was a keen birder, he’s got himself involved with dragonflies. And they’ve got 200 species of dragonfly recorded.

**INT: Wow.**

P27: And we went out there just on our own for two weeks. I mean we managed 60, which was pretty pathetic really. But I mean it’s still far more than the UK pop- You know, number of species. And we were hoping to go back but that’s looking pretty slim at the moment with the way things are out there.

**INT: It’s not great there is it.**

P27: So you know, I mean that gives you hope, when you see what’s been achieved there in a relatively short space of time. I mean okay it’s not prime rainforest. It’s secondary forest. But it provides, you know, it provides habitat and [unclear: 00:53:31] are starting to reappear. And it’s looking really good. They’ve introduced <name 00:53:36> in there. They’ve got [s/l tapirs 00:53:38] reintroduced. They’ve got a reintroduction programme of tapirs in the environment now. And they used to come round the lodge of an evening. [laughs] So [unclear: 0:53:50], and they’ve been recording the moths there. There’s a guy just published a book, oh golly, Georges, and he is a keen lepidopterist. And they’ve just published a guide. And that’s got something like 800 moth species in it.

**INT: Are they running it as an ecotourism place then?**

P27: Yes, yes. Yes.

**INT: Oh okay.**

P27: But they’re involved with the World Land Trust. And they’re constantly pushing to buy more land. And obviously by buying it it increases the level of protection, and then the planting, they have a nursery on the site and they’re collecting tree seeds from the local environment round and about. They’re geminating, producing the plants and then they’re going out there and planting up farmland. I mean you know these trees are growing at a ridiculous rate out in that climate. And so you’ve got canopy cover within a few years. And once you get to that level things obviously start to develop more, you know, the fauna and flora starts to develop more quickly. So, but yes, fascinating. I’d love to go back. I’d love to go back.

**INT: Like you say it does you hope when you see how quickly things can actually come back once you give them a chance. You know, even places like you know the Knepp estate down in Sussex, you know, even he, if you feel like- And it’s not even that big is it? But just give stuff a chance and it will come back.**

P27: No I went, we tried- We nearly, we tried to go to Knepp last time we were down that way. And we’re going down, we’ve got a holiday cottage booked down there again at the end of May. So the plan is we’re trying to get on one of the tours, it’s very, very difficult, they’re all getting booked up way in advance. So we’ll just go park up and there’s various footpaths so we’ll just go and walk round the site, which we didn’t manage to do last time. So yes, it is but then what’s frustrating is, is in the current lockdown thing that we’ve had, the number of people that have a) been out into countryside is great, but been nice to connect with nature, but they’re just trashing it. And you think, for all this sort of wellbeing and everything else that goes with it-

**INT: I know.**

P27: Why can they not just take their litter home and their dog poo bags and everything else. And that’s- We’re not going to some of these places at the moment because there’s just too many people going.

**INT: Yes, no we felt like we go down to [Nature reserve] quite a lot. And we went down there sort of last, well last autumn, summer, you couldn’t even get a car parking space because it was just so- And you just worry about not just the litter, but the impact of the disturbance of all those people on, you know-**

P27: Yes absolutely.

**INT: We went down last week actually and there was like a professional dog walker there, walking the dogs across the common rather than staying on the paths. And you just think, you know, ground nesting birds. Yes. Like you say, you want to encourage this enthusiasm for nature, because you hope that it will lead to people appreciating it more and wanting to protect it. But it doesn’t always seem to go hand in hand does it.**

P27: There’s just too many of us. At the moment, you know, everybody’s confined. I mean I would hope that now as the shops are opening up a bit more and people can start to get back to doing some of the activities that they also like to do, that it will take the pressure off a bit.

**INT: Yes.**

P27: I mean [SITE] up by us here, I was talking to a guy the other night, we haven’t been for quite a long time. When the first lockdown kicked in it was nice because we could cycle there and there was nobody there because they’d actually closed the car park, but we could still manage to cycle through. And there’d be nobody there and it was so peaceful. But since then it’s been overrun by dogwalkers and some of these mountain biking groups, they’re just causing havoc in some of the woods round here, just trashing it. Just putting, creating cycle tracks where they shouldn’t be. So, and that’s obviously going to create a lot of disturbance. And you’re damaging the flora at the same point in time. So, but anyway.

**INT: What is the answer? I don’t know.**

P27: No I don’t, I don’t know, I don’t know what the answer to that is.

**INT: No. It’s been very lovely to talk to you. Thank you for your time.**

P27: No problem. I hope you found it useful.

**INT: I hope you manage to get to some of these places that you want to go back to, down to Sussex and maybe even to Brazil, possibly not this year. But maybe next year.**

P27: Yes well, Sussex is more or less a definite now. We’ve paid the money and we’ve been told we can go. So unless anything drastic happens we’ll be down in Sussex. So we shall hopefully get to Knepp this year.

**INT: Yes, that would be nice.**

P27: Whether we’ll get to Brazil or not I’ve no idea. I mean that’s just on the back burner for the moment. But we have potentially a dragonfly walk on [SITE] planned for some time through the summer. It’ll be posted up on the [NATURAL HISTORY GROUP] website. You’d be very welcome to join us.

**INT: Yes, I will have a look. Is it a- Do you have a Facebook group or is it a website?**

**[01:00:07]**

P27: We have a website and we also have a Facebook group.

**INT: I’m going to have a look. Yes, even when we there, when was it, it was over the Easter holidays, it was so cold, it was snowing. It wasn’t really nice. And there’s so many like wet patches aren’t there around there. It must be great for dragonflies and other things.**

P27: Yes. Although one or two years have been quite dry. I like [Village] better. And we hold a walk on [Village] as well every year. We’ve done it jointly in the last few years with [CONSERVATION CHARITY], with [NAME]. Because both those sites are flagship sites for the [CONSERVATION CHARITY]. So they’ve done quite a lot of work there. They’ve done EDNA surveys for Great Crested newts and so on. EDNA surveys I think they’re called. And they did quite a lot of work on trying to establish <name 01:01:13>, the little, that little fern, it grows at [Village]. But with them being good sites for dragonflies she’s been keen, and I mean I’ve known [Name] now for quite a long time. So we always get a good turnout at those meetings. And get some different people coming along that we wouldn’t normally see as well as some of the more enthusiastic local ones. So it’s always very good, very pleasing, you know rewarding meetings usually.

**INT: Yes. I will keep an eye for that. I’ve been slightly off the radar for the last few years with having young children. But my youngest is two now. So he’s getting a little bit more, I can leave him a bit more now and go and do things that I want to do. [laughs] Which is nice.**

P27: Yes well when they’re a bit older they’ll be able to come along won’t they.

**INT: Exactly. Yes well actually my oldest would love that. He’s five. And he’s very into all sorts of wildlife. He absolutely loves all that sort of stuff. So I would bring him along actually maybe.**

P27: All those sorts of events we net a few insects and put them in little pots so people can get close up views. So that’s the whole thing, the kids love it.

**INT: Yes he would love that. Yes I will definitely keep an eye for that and we will try and come along. Yes. That would be great. Lovely to talk to you.**

P27: Okay.

**INT: And thank you very much for your time. It’s been really useful.**

P27: No problem.

**INT: Yes, okay, and I hope to see you over the summer at some point.**

P27: Yes, yes, yes. Very good, I hope your projects goes well anyway.

**INT: Thank you, thank you very much. Take care.**

P27: Okay then. Cheers.

**INT: Bye.**

P27: Bye now.

**Audio ends: [01:02:55]**