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SA-2020-91 Establishing a St Helena Biological Records System

The St Helena Research Institute (SHRI) has secured funding to develop a Biological Recording System for the Island. The project has been funded by The Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of European Overseas (BEST 2.0+).

The Biological Recording System will bring together plant and insect records that exist within different organisations and databases, to establish a centralised database.

The database will be accessible online through a web portal and phone-based app. This enables records to be added whether you're a professional conservationist or an amateur naturalist. So as long as you have a phone with you, you will have the ability to add your new sightings to the database. The data collected through this app will create opportunities to share your sightings with the recording community, as well as be made available to support research. Through this app, it creates opportunities for St Helena, such as studying medium to long-term trends of plant and animal presence and abundance. In turn, the information can help enhance decision-making to take the steps to improve biodiversity and ecosystem management on the Island. For example by improved knowledge of the spread of invasive non-native species, or reduced occurrence of endangered species.

The project is supported by a large number of local and international stakeholders which include: The Environment, Natural Resources and Planning Portfolio (Environmental Management Division, Biosecurity, Agricultural Development); St Helena Government GIS Office; The Saint Helena National Trust; The Centre of Ecology and Hydrology (UKCEH); Dr Roger Key; Dr Howard Mendel; Professor Quentin Cronk; Dr Timm Karisch and Jodie Scipio Constantine as a community member.

This BEST 2.0+ Project has received funding from the European Union.

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SHRI Coordinator, Dr Rebecca Cairns-Wicks, said:
"I'm extremely grateful to BEST 2.0+ for supporting this exciting project. Through the Project, we hope to grow interest in wildlife observation and recording. Historically most of the plant and animal records on the Island have been made by scientists and often as a result of dedicated surveys. This has given us a wealth of data about what's here naturally and what's been introduced over time; where it can be found and how rare or common they are, but there is still a lot we don't know. There are new species to be discovered and identified (both native to the Island and introduced) and we also want to better understand how species numbers and the area they occupy vary over the seasons and years. Having more records that show when and where a particular plant or invertebrate has been observed and adding new information year-on-year will help us to analyse and interpret trends in behaviour. For example, whether there's a difference in when a plant flowers each year or when an insect emerges after winter dormancy. Information such as this will add to our understanding of our environment, how it is changing and what the drivers of that change are e.g. climate. It's only through getting people involved that we can make big breakthroughs in our knowledge, develop understanding and improve the way we do things.
I'm also delighted to welcome Selene Gough to the SHRI. Selene joins us in the new post of BEST 2.0+ Project Officer and will be taking the leading role in driving this project forward with the project stakeholders."

BEST Project Officer, Selene Gough, added:
"I'm thrilled to be leading a project that builds upon decades of work by many previous stakeholders, and supports the development of a system that helps to provide a greater understanding of the Islands ecosystems. I'm excited to see the opportunities that this Project will bring for the community as a whole to engage with St Helena's wildlife."

St Helena Research Institute, 10th November 2021

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