

Standardising data in Mapmate

An initial stab at suggestions for ways to standardise data... it's good to discuss these things and work towards a consensus.

If you are going to use Mapmate to provide data to people, you need to think about what you put into it. Avoid self-destructive things like "I think it might be this, but can't be sure" (just leave that one out) or self-incriminating things such as "I trespassed across the private estate because there was no-one in." Think about how it will look when presented to a public enquiry by a consultant.

One quirk of Mapmate is the possibility of endless duplication of sites, recorders, etc. Always check to see whether your site or recorder is already in the system before adding another. If you add a new one, try to use the same style as already exists – e.g. normal English grammar and punctuation. Don't use all capitals. Here are some recommendations for standard formats:

- **Site.** Just write the site name as it appears on a map, e.g. "Attingham Park" or "Wem Moss". Don't add owner of status, e.g. "nature reserve" or "SSSI". Don't give a postal address (e.g. "White Farm meadow, White Farm Lane, Bridgnorth.") For farms, you can have "Home Farm, Attingham" if it would otherwise be ambiguous, or just "Pimhill Farm". If the location is nowhere in particular, give the name of the village or parish as the site. For linear features such as rivers or canals, divide them into lengths that fit within a 1km square of the national grid – "River Roden at Rodington", or "Montgomery Canal at Aston Locks."
- **Recorder.** It is best to put surname first. Our technique is to give title and name in this format: "Lockton, Mr A.J." Note the precise use of punctuation, etc. – if everyone uses that style then it doesn't matter if some names become duplicated. But if you put me in as "Alex Lockton" then it is a huge amount of work for someone to standardise the list when a report is produced.
- **Stage, abundance,** etc. Leave these out unless you are going to definitely use them, in which case you should consistently and always fill them in. There is an option for "unknown" or "not recorded".
- **Grid references.** In Mapmate the grid reference and the site are linked. If you have a site that crosses a 10km line, then you need two sites: "Titterstone Clee, SO6977" and "Titterstone Clee, SO7077" or whatever. Grid references are used for mapping species, so think about whether you really need a very high degree of accuracy. If you recorded ten quadrats on the Long Mynd, you would not have to create ten sites – just "The Long Mynd" would do, and the comment field could say, "Q1, SO44669755". We're never going to want to map the distribution of quadrats *en masse*; and if you want to plot a few you can extract the 10 m square from the comments field.. For moth traps in gardens a 1km square will do nicely. For flying bats, a 1km square is enough; save the 8-figure grid references for the roosts.
- **Reference.** This is most useful for working out who owns the data. "Bat Group records", "Botanical Society records" is perfect. If you extract data from a book or paper, you can give the actual reference. Do not create references such as "my field notebooks" or "visit to Dudmaston 2/9/2007." Whatever you do, keep it simple.
- **Comments** are useful for validating records and giving confidence that they are right. There is nothing worse than a record of something rare and unlikely with no evidence that the recorder knew what they were doing. "A small patch in the grassland of the reserve just below Aston Bottom Lock; specimen at **LIV**" would be perfect.