



Report of decisions on data sensitivity based on discussion meetings.

A1, Management and availability of the Flying Squirrel occurrence data

Finnish Museum of Natural History / FMNH



The project has received funding from the LIFE programme of the European Union. The material reflects the views by the authors, and the European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.



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Abstract

The occurrence data including the data on breeding grounds and resting places of Flying Squirrel will be gathered and shared via the specifically developed services by FMNH / Finnish Biodiversity Information Facility (FinBIF) through the Flying squirrel LIFE (LIFE17/NAT/FI/000469) project.

The level of openness of the data has been under scrutiny by the project partners and this report indicates the guidelines under which the data is been handled. The discussions have been led by the Finnish Museum of Natural History (FMNH) as part of the tasks set for FMNH.

The discussions have been carried out mainly at meetings where all relevant partners have attended and the open-ended discussion (phone, e-mail etc.) have been ongoing of the matter.

The conclusions of this report are based on the discussions and they reflect the general opinion. The conclusions led to the formulation of the guidelines on how the Flying Squirrel data is shared through FinBIF specific services.

Background

Publishing biodiversity data **for open use** is challenging. Several **reasons** exist for why some content in biodiversity data **should not be made public**, but rather kept confidential – either partially or completely – due to its sensitive nature. The most essential reasons are as follows:

- **Nature conservation:** endangered species, protection regulations, international environmental agreements and commitments, sensitivity to disturbances depending on time/location, etc.
- **Data ownership and management:** personal data, research use, business activities, etc.
- **Biosafety:** organisms harmful to humans, animals and plants, such as plant diseases, pests, etc.

Legislation

The Act on the Openness of Government Activities (**21 May 1999/621**) is the most important legislation in Finland governing how biodiversity data is made less specific (generalized) or the access to data is restricted.

Section 24 – Secret official documents, item 14: Documents containing information on endangered animal or plant species or the protection of important natural habitats, if access would compromise the protection of the species or the habitat.



Method of generalisation or accessibility restriction of data

Sensitive data held by the Finnish Biodiversity Information Facility is protected by either generalising location data (made less specific) or restricting the access of the data. This applies to species whose protection would be threatened by data disclosure due to persecution, hunting, disturbance (e.g., bird watching, photography) or commercial or hobby-based illegal collection activities. The threat must be specifically directed at the species in question. Justification is given separately for each species. For some species, the need to generalise data applies only part of the year, such as in nesting and wintering seasons. Data will be generalised to the extent that location cannot be deduced from, for example, existing habitats suitable for certain species.

List of species with sensitive data

The working group for public authorities at the Finnish Biodiversity Information Facility has come to an agreement on the species whose location data is included in the observation records will be generalised or restricted on the Laji.fi website. Data in its original, specific form is, however, available to the public authorities to support good decision-making.

With the help of extensive and comprehensive feedback, discussions were continued and the list was agreed upon.

Update needs for the list of sensitive data held by the Finnish Biodiversity Information Facility, will be regularly reviewed.

- [The Finnish Biodiversity Information Facility – list of sensitive species data \(in Finnish\)](#)

Conclusions

In the beginning of the consultation, it was needed to clarify that currently Flying Squirrel data is not considered as sensitive at the FinBIF services due to the agreement followed by a vast consultation process leading to the [List of sensitive species data](#). Also there was a need to share the contents of the current policies by the Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE) and The Finnish Forest Centre (Metsäkeskus) in regards to the sharing of the Flying Squirrel data. The SYKE has been sharing the Flying Squirrel data (among other threatened species data) with almost entire forest sector in Finland on annual bases, based on an agreement with Finnish Forest Industries, registered association (Metsäteollisuus ry). The Finnish Forest Centre shares all available Flying Squirrel occurrence data to the land (forest) owners via the Metsään.fi-portal, which is accessible for all real estate owners.

The intense discussions and varied opinions led to the consensus decisions of the content of **the Guidelines**. It gives enough flexibility to the partners to decide on their behalf, if e.g. they see that, there are good grounds to generalise some data and/or not to share some data at all to the open service. However, all data should be made available, without generalisation, to the public authorities via the specific services by FinBIF. This requirement may be challenged with explanatory rationale.

The general view was that there is a need for open data to an extent that it is feasible. If there shall be restrictions in this regard, it has to be clearly communicated in order to avoid harmful decision due to inadequate information available. There is also a need for understanding that the Flying Squirrel guidelines of data access should not be opposing to the current policies by the organisations reporting to the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Forestry and Agriculture.



The Guidelines of Flying Squirrel data sharing and accessibility

1. **Occurrence data (nesting or observation) of Flying Squirrel** will be made open and public via the services of FinBIF, as it has been gathered from different information system sources. The use of the data will be under the [Creative Commons licence CC 4.0 BY](#).

For specific reason, there is an exception to the above. The owners of the data may restrict the access of the occurrence data **to be shared only with the public authorities**, as FinBIF describes them, and the **publicly available data will be generalised** by coarsening the location of the occurrence to 10x10 km² rectangular, using the standardised tools and methods at [FinBIF](#). This will prevent revealing the accurate location of the occurrence. These exceptions, need to be clearly communicated at FinBIF services. The responsible body of the content of the communication is the owner of the data, who needs to provide FinBIF the needed information and the rationale behind and the method of restriction should be included to the metadata description of the dataset.

2. **Georeferenced data concerning the core area, breeding area, feeding area, resting area and connectivity corridors etc.** together may be visualised as a set of map layers. All this information, from technical view, may be restricted or openly available. The core-area (ydinalue) will be outlined in a separate map layer when the site will be established using the FinBIF tool. All other areas/layers are usually within the borders of the core area and they may be added and updated once the new data will be added to the established site. Other areas may also be identified and marked on the map for owners' internal use only to support planning processes etc. or they may also become available for public authorities or even be publicly available, if so decided by the owner.
3. **Potential sites/areas e.g. for breeding**, are not considered as open data due to the speculations that may arise, if opened. However, there may be need to share this data among the public authorities. Whether to share the potential sites/areas information with public authorities, it is up to the owner of the data to decide.
4. **The Flying Squirrel data gathering form**, specifically designed for the LIFE project, at FinBIF, will be accessible for all partners through a permission by the administrator of FinBIF Notebook-services. Partners will be able to browse other partners' information, which is defined open, but will not have an access to amend the form or the data. The planning of the result pages for public access, will be done with close consultation with all partners during the course of the project.