**Prior specification in Bayesian occupancy modelling improves analysis of species occurrence data**

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This paper tests variations of an occupancy modelling framework that is used to estimate species occupancy from occurrence data. As a result, we have been able to establish a new model variant that can now handle low recording intensity data. Previously, the original framework could only generate useful information on species occupancy for about 20% of those analysed, with the new framework this has increased to over 50%. Using this method, it has been possible to estimate annual species status for many thousands of plants and invertebrates. This will have a particular impact on UK biodiversity monitoring and will result in greater numbers of species contributing to national scale analyses such as the UK Biodiversity Indicators and the State of Nature 2019 report.

I am currently in the final year of my PhD and Ben was my supervisor at UCL. Within this part of my PhD Ben provided a bigger picture perspective, ensuring that I wasn’t bogged down with the detail but was able to coherently explain the complex terms involved to a broad audience. During this time, and throughout my PhD, Ben was the person I went to when I was feeling overwhelmed. From the very start of this PhD journey, when Ben nodded reassuringly to me throughout my PhD interview to our catch up meetings where I would have a good moan about everything that wasn’t going to plan, Ben always left me feeling more in control and more able to manage the situation that was troubling me. Not being based at UCL I didn’t see Ben as much as I would have liked, however the time I spent with him was always fun and fulfilling.

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