

Hertfordshire Natural History Society Management Committee Report for the year April 2015-March 2016

Aim and purposes

Hertfordshire Natural History Society promotes the study and recording of the flora and fauna of Hertfordshire and encourages a wider interest in natural history, including the conservation of wildlife, habitats and geological features for the purpose of environmental protection or improvement.

Achievements and performance

Wildlife recording

The growth of data collection and sharing in electronic form has increased our ability to make meaningful data available for research and conservation purposes. We are pleased that the new Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre (HERC) has established itself within the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT) and that sufficient funding has been secured for the next few years. It is, however, disappointing that Natural England has withdrawn its funding for the Centre. The HERC Manager, Ian Carle, is one of our Trustees and we hope that all the county recorders will pass a copy of their records to the Centre.

Our websites were the main focus of day-to-day activities, augmented by our Facebook, Twitter and Flickr accounts. We continued to encourage volunteers and professionals to collect and submit records of wildlife in the county. This can be done through our websites, via national schemes such as BTO Birdtrack and the Mammal Society, or directly to the relevant recorder by email or on paper.

In January 2015 we took the decision to upgrade our websites to make them more easily accessible from mobile phones and to include map-based record submission. The new HNHS website went live in March 2016. The new content management system is based on 'Indicia' – an open source module developed by the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) and already used for our Flora recording. The records-capture mechanism includes a map-based representation of the sites, enabling contributors to find grid references and associate their records with the relevant locations. We hope this will encourage more and better quality record submissions. It will also ensure that our data complies with the requirements of the Hertfordshire Environmental Record Centre and NBN.

Surveys and projects

Mammals, amphibians and reptiles: countywide survey and atlas 2015-2019 This major project – Herts MARA – started in January 2015 and enjoyed a successful first year thanks to hard work by its organisers, Chantal Helm, Ian Flack, Jenny Jones and Dave Willis. The survey results and coverage so far are displayed on the atlas website at <http://mammal-atlas.hnhs.org>.

We have also set up a new website to display the results of the atlas, see <http://mammal-atlas.hnhs.org/>. This has been funded by donations from HNHS members. We aim to publish the results in a new book.

Monitoring at Heartwood Forest The joint Woodland Trust and Herts Natural History Society Heartwood Monitoring Group were thrilled to be nominated to attend the 2015 Woodland Trust Volunteer Awards event in Leeds on 10 November. The Group won the Willow Award for the best collaborative effort, and a special Woodland Trust Chairman's Award for their outstanding contribution to environmental monitoring work at Heartwood. The photograph shows members of the group, with Woodland Trust Chairman Nicola Nicholls, at an event to dedicate an area of Heartwood to the Group. It shows, from the left, Ian Flack, Linda McArdle, Andrew Steele, Brian Legg, Linda Smith, Ken Smith, Nicola Nicholls, Albert Callewaert, Louise Neicho, Pete Cutforth, Geoff Horn and Colin Shawyer. During the year the monitoring programme



was extended to include sapling survival and growth, mammals, birds, butterflies and other invertebrates, flora, lichens and fungi. The results are published on our website at www.hnhs.org where there is a link to 'Heartwood monitoring project'.

Tree Sparrow Recovery Project Volunteers from Herts Bird Club are monitoring the last remaining breeding colony in the county by fitting selected birds with tiny electronic tags. This is already revealing fascinating information about the birds. The Club provides supplementary feeding for the Tree Sparrows at both Coursers Farm and Tyttenhanger Farm all year round and monitors nest boxes.



The Herts Flora Group The Group continues to assist with recording for the London *Flora*, which includes about a third of Hertfordshire, and is also now engaged in sample 10km field recording for the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland for the *Atlas 2020* Project.

Publications

Transactions of the Hertfordshire Natural History Society 2015, Volume 47

Part 1: The Hertfordshire Bird Report 2013 was published in March 2015,

Part 2: The Hertfordshire Naturalist 2015 was published in September 2015.

Part 3: The Hertfordshire Bird Report 2014 was published in November 2015. Everyone on the team worked hard to publish the 2014 report in less than a year.

Future publications Our butterfly recorder, Andrew Wood, is working on the text for a new book *Butterflies of Hertfordshire and Middlesex*, which we hope will be published in 2016. Trevor James, our beetle recorder

is compiling a book *The Beetles of Hertfordshire* and Tom Gladwin has almost completed a *Checklist of Hertfordshire Lacewings and their Allies*.

Events

The Festival of Wildlife

The Society teamed up with the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust for a weekend of events in August to celebrate our county's wildlife. Staff and volunteers at the Trust and volunteers from the Society worked hard to set up a series of talks and outdoor events at Grebe House and Verulamium Museum in St Albans. This was the second year of the Festival, which we hope will now become an annual event.

Autumn Conference and AGM

Another successful autumn conference was held at Woolmer Green Hall on Saturday 17 October, with about 90 people attending. During the afternoon: Phil Belfield from the Environment Agency who is our county fish recorder, talked about the fish of Hertfordshire and their ecology; Joe Gray, our bugs recorder introduced the new Herts Invertebrate Project; Chantal Helm from the University of Hertfordshire updated us on progress with the Hertfordshire Mammal, Amphibian and Reptile Atlas (MARA); and Jennifer Gilbert, HMWT's People and Wildlife Officer, discussed the history and wildlife of Panshanger Park, including recent developments and what the future holds. The HNHS 1875 Awards for 2014 were presented to Trevor James and Chris Dee (see below).

The 139th Annual General Meeting took place as part of the autumn conference and was chaired by Trevor James. The officers and trustees elected at the AGM are listed below.

Invited lecture

At our joint meeting with Welwyn Natural History Society on 25 November, local geology expert, Haydon Bailey gave a lecture entitled *Living in Hertfordshire for a million years*.

Herts Bird Club/BTO Conference

The conference was held at Affinity Water's business centre in Hatfield on 27 February with well over 100 attending. We are grateful to Alister Leggatt and Affinity Water for their generosity in providing their facilities for our use. Proceedings were opened by Ken Smith (Herts Bird Club). The talks included a ten-year review of the birds of Tyttenhanger by Alan Gardiner and a review of Hertfordshire's birds of prey by Mike Ilett, chair of the Herts Rare Birds Panel. Paul Hackett,

a well-known bird photographer, rounded off the event with an insight into the mysteries of successful digiscoping. In addition, the Herts Bird Club/British Trust for Ornithology surveys for 2016 were introduced by the new Hertfordshire BTO representative, Martin Ketcher, details of the national House Martin survey were explained by the BTO's Ian Woodward and Graham Knight teased us with 'All the best birds of 2015 – what did you miss?'

Many thanks go to Tim Hill for organising all these events, to all the speakers and contributors and to Society members for their support.

The HNHS 1875 Awards for 2015

The annual 1875 Award recognises an outstanding Hertfordshire naturalist and/or someone who has made an outstanding contribution to natural history in Hertfordshire on a voluntary basis. This year the awards went to Trevor James– ‘an outstanding Hertfordshire naturalist’ – and to Chris Dee, for his ‘outstanding contribution to natural history in Hertfordshire’.



Top: Trevor James receiving his HNHS 1875 Award from former award winner June Crew, and below: Chris Dee (right) being presented with the 1875 Award by Mike Ilett, chair of Herts Bird Club rarities panel (photos Tim Hill).

Support for specialist groups

Our website provides a focus for interest in natural history in the county. New this year was The Herts Invertebrate Project, an initiative to promote the recording of invertebrates by organising a calendar of site surveys. The programme is co-organised by William Bishop and Joe Gray, who are both enthusiastic amateur naturalists. The objective is to increase the number of invertebrate records being made at a variety of key sites across the county, especially for under-recorded species groups. The project's meetings are open to all. The Herts Invertebrate Project also aims to encourage newcomers to recording to develop their confidence and skills, thereby increasing the number of people with the interest and ability to contribute to biological recording. More details and the project's programme of meetings can be found on our website. The HNHS site also hosts websites for the Herts Bird Club, Herts Moth Group and Herts Flora Group and web pages for other specialist areas: lichens, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, bugs, dragonflies and the Heartwood monitoring project. We co-ordinate a diary of wildlife events, meetings and field trips on behalf of all natural history and wildlife groups across the county. The diary of events is published on our website and distributed in paper form as appropriate.

Financial review

The Society remains in a sound financial position. At the end of the financial year, cash funds stood at £38,767, an increase of some £15,000 over the course of the year. This increase was largely down to a very generous legacy left to the Society by Gerald Salisbury and income received from the sale of *Birds of Hertfordshire*.

During the coming financial year we anticipate publishing our next book (*Butterflies of Hertfordshire and Middlesex*), digitising some of our archive material, and upgrading the Bird Club website which we expect to draw heavily on our project funds. In the meantime, income from subscriptions, Gift Aid, and meetings continues to cover our routine expenditure from the General Fund, so there appears no need to increase membership subscriptions.

The accounts are prepared on a cash basis in accordance with Charity Commission guidance.

Responsibilities of trustees: The charity's trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. As the Society's gross income for the year is more than the £25,000 threshold, there is an independent review of the accounts.

Volunteers

The Society is managed and run entirely by volunteers. We would like to thank all the volunteers who work so hard to keep the Society going, in particular all the county recorders, the editors of our two journals and those moderating and updating the websites, Jack Fearnside, Alan Gardiner, Linda Smith, Steve Blake and Graham Knight and the Herts Mammals, Amphibians and Reptiles Atlas team.

Members news We are sorry to note the deaths of three long-standing and highly respected members of the Society. John Baker, who died in November 2015, was the Council member and editor who re-branded the Society's Transactions as *The Hertfordshire Naturalist* in the mid-1990s. Peggy Cunningham, a former President and Council member, naturalist and wildlife film-maker, died on 15 January 2016 aged 93. Evelyn Barron, who at 101 years of age was our oldest member, died in February 2016. They each made a huge contribution to the work of the Society over many years. Peggy and Evelyn both generously left legacies to the Society, for which we are very grateful.

Structure, governance and management

The Society is a registered charity, governed by a formal constitution last amended in 2002. The Trustees of the Society are elected each year at the Annual General Meeting in October or November and form the Management Committee. This year 11 trustees were elected at the AGM (see table below) and Joe Gray was co-opted onto the committee at our January 2016 meeting. During the year the Committee met three times, on 12 May, 8 September and 22 January. The membership of the Society has remained stable through the year and stood at 446 at 31 March 2016. Linda Smith stood down as the Society's secretary in April 2016, as she and her husband Ken have moved to West Sussex. We are pleased to announce that David Utting has been co-opted as the new Secretary.

Administrative information

The Society's registered address changed in April 2016 from 24 Mandeville Rise, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 7JU to 250 Sandridge Road, St Albans, AL1 4AL.

Plans to digitise the Transactions of the Hertfordshire Natural History Society

At our April management committee meeting we agreed to instigate a project to make the Society's historic archive of transactions available online. This would be largely funded from some generous bequests and make the wealth of knowledge contained within these documents, starting with Volume 1 of the Watford Natural History Society in 1875, readily available for people to use.

A couple of our neighbouring natural history societies have recently made their journals available with great success – Bedfordshire www.bnhs.co.uk/focuson/journals/html/index.htm and Essex www.essexfieldclub.org.uk/portal/p/Unlocking+the+Natural+History+Heritage+of+Essex. Our aim is to combine the best features of both of these sites using Optical Character Recognition software to allow the content of our transactions to be searched automatically and also to allow them to be browsed through one volume at a time. We will still send *The Hertfordshire Naturalist* to our members and only add them to our online archive after a suitable time period has elapsed.

If you would like any more information about the project, or would like to help in some way, please send an email to ian.carle@hercinfo.org.uk.

Ian Carle

