Management Committee of the Hertfordshire Natural History Society Report for the year April 2025 to March 2026

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

Celebrations marking the Society's 150th anniversary continued during the year. The commemorative *Wild about Hertfordshire* exhibition at St Albans Museum (featured in the 2024-25 annual report) closed in early July after attracting more than 17,000 visitors. A second, well-attended exhibition, *Wildlife – for the record*, ran at North Hertfordshire Museum in Hitchin from mid-December to March 2026. The Society's Autumn Meeting in October included a talk on HNHS history by the Secretary, David Utting. The 'sesquicentenary' concluded with a lunchtime reception for members at North Hertfordshire Museum, attended by the High Sheriff of Hertfordshire, Nicholas Buxton.

The increased publicity profile achieved through the exhibitions and accompanying media coverage is likely to have contributed to a 10 per cent increase in membership to 560. The *Hertfordshire Naturalist* 2025 was published in October as a specially extended 150th anniversary edition

Fieldwork continued on the Hertfordshire Dragonfly and Damselfly atlas survey. Organisers of the ten-year Mammals, Amphibians and Reptiles Atlas (Herts MARA) survey which ended in December 2024, continued to write-up the results. The Society's management committee initiated a project to re-design the HNHS and Herts Bird Club websites. An initial consultation with members took place in early 2026.

Wildlife recording

Most wildlife records collected and collated by the Society and its network of county recorders are submitted electronically. This facilitates data sharing and dissemination. Four million records have been collected by the Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre (HERC) since 2013, most of which have been submitted through the Society.

We encourage volunteers and professionals to collect and submit wildlife records through our own websites, or using national schemes, chiefly iRecord and the BSBI Atlas. The HNHS provides its own website recording portals for birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles, and dragonflies. Social media opportunities for exchanging information and images are maintained through Facebook, BlueSky Social and Flickr. Records can also be submitted to the relevant county recorder by email or on paper.

Surveys and projects

Dragonfly and damselfly atlas survey The recorded flight season for dragonflies and damselflies in the county during 2025 was unusually long with the first Large Red Damselfly found on 25 March and Common Darters flying as late as 13 December. Survey work for the 2022-2027 atlas project continued to go well with many species showing clear indications of having spread. Emerald Damselfly and Brown Hawker seem to have declined, however, and common species such as Azure Damselfly and Blue-tailed Damselfly may have been lost from some tetrads, largely due to a loss of smaller ponds.

The highlight among scarcer species seen was a male Vagrant Emperor seen briefly over farmland north-west of Buntingford on 27 June. Elsewhere, a Downy Emerald was photographed at Symondshyde Great Wood, a new site, on 16 May, and a single male Southern Migrant Hawker at 'the scrape' at Hilfield Park Reservoir for at least three hours on 12 August. Beautiful Demoiselle, Norfolk Hawker and



Migrant Hawker, Cole Green (Photo, Steve Chilton)



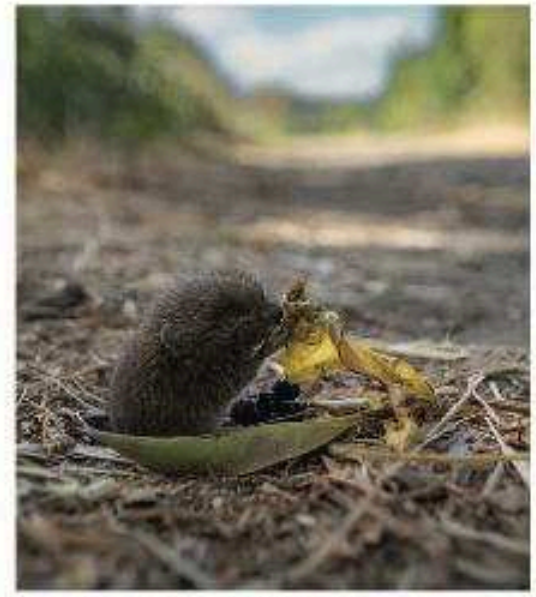
Common Frog Rana temporaria, *Hertford, March 2026 (Photo, Allan Burrows)*

Lesser Emperor continued to extend their range and there were a number of reports of Scarce Chaser and Red-veined Darter. A few reports of Scarce Emerald Damselfly came from Hertford Heath but there were no records, disappointingly, of Scarce Blue-tailed Damselflies from Kingsmead.

Mammals, amphibians and reptile atlas (Herts MARA) The ten-year Hertfordshire Mammal, Amphibian and Reptile Atlas (MARA) survey ended on 31 December 2024. The MARA team (Jenny Jones, Chantal Helm, Ian Flack and Dave Willis) continued to prepare species accounts for the forthcoming atlas, to be published by HNHS. This will include all Herts records since 2000, including those from the survey.

Herts Invertebrate Project (HIP) The group held productive monthly field meetings from April to October. Seven reserves and other sites were visited producing around 740 records. For information about locations and the rarer species discovered see Ian Carle's article in this edition (p. 27). Thanks go to Ian Carle and Gail Ashton for helping to organise the meetings. Congratulations go to Gail and to Rory Dimond, another active HIP member, on the publication of *A Photographic guide to Flies of Britain and Ireland* of which they are co-authors (see the book review in this edition p. 76).

Monitoring at Heartwood Forest Records continue to be submitted to HERC and to national databases. It is hoped that volunteer recorders will make increasing use of the Heartwood 'Activity' that the monitoring group has created in iRecord to bring together records from the site, enabling comparisons to be made over time. The data gathered contribute to understanding species distributions across the County and assists habitat management at Heartwood itself. To mark ten years since the Heartwood Arboretum was planted,



Harvest Mouse (Photo, Robin Gilmore)

increased recording effort has been focused there, together with guided walks to raise public awareness of the variety of growing trees and surrounding wildlife.

Invertebrate surveys have yielded interesting records including species that are probably new for Hertfordshire. Surveyors have noted how the relatively low height of the young trees makes their canopies easier to study! Highlights have included new County records for a larva of the Aspen 'Slug' Sawfly, *Caliroa tremulae*, and species of weevils and flies. A 'Nationally Notable' leafhopper was found in the Hertfordshire Way compartment and a new ichneumid wasp, *Rhynchobanchus flavopictus* was discovered that is possibly only the fourth record for the UK.

Moths recorded from light trapping sessions in 2025 included 26 new species for the site. Netted Ochre, *Ypsolopha lucella*, found in July 2025 had been previously recorded in Sandridge in 1890 (with just one other Hertfordshire record in 1929). It is currently classified as 'Nationally Scarce'. Excitingly, in July 2026, another four Netted Ochres were found, prompting habitat management discussions. Among a further 15 new species for Heartwood were Red Underwing and Light Crimson Underwing. Continued monitoring of butterfly transects saw the number of individuals observed in 2025 increase substantially to 3,138 from 2,041 the previous year. Brimstones, Large Whites, Green-veined Whites, Purple Hairstreak, Peacock, Comma, Small Blue and Common Blue appeared to be doing particularly well. Numbers were expectedly lower, as the woodland matures, for Marbled White, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper and Small Heath. Along the survey transects three Purple Emperors were recorded, but there were more than 20

sightings elsewhere around Heartwood in 2025.

Monthly bird walks recorded around 40 species on most visits, with a peak of 48 in August. The Breeding Bird Survey transects monitored in April and May revealed a general increase in Linnets across the site and good numbers of Garden Warblers and Willow Warblers. Nesting behaviour was observed for Linnets, Garden Warbler, Whitethroat, Blackcap and Reed Bunting. Fewer Meadow Pipits and no Cuckoos were found during the recording period (one Cuckoo was heard later). Redpoll and Siskin benefitted from abundant alder and birch catkins and the mature trees and scrub provided good habitat for Garden and Willow Warblers. The data being collected feeds into management recommendations for coppicing, wetland and gorse scrub areas.

Flora recording in the eastern wetland area continued despite the very dry summers that have reduced the area of water substantially. Invasive Pale Galingale, *Cyperus eragrostis*, seems now to be under control but New Zealand Pygmy weed, *Crassula helmsii*, has spread around the whole pond area. The 2025-26 surveys focused on compartments not previously recorded on the east side of the site. In a section of the orchard area there was a wonderful display of Grass Vetchling, *Lathyrus nissolia*, an indicator of good quality grassland. The transects will be revisited for monitoring at longer time intervals. Orchids attract attention and accurate locations have been recorded for Pyramidal Orchids across the site. It will be interesting to examine their distribution over time.

The fungi highlight of 2025 was the discovery in Heartwood's 'Magical Wood' section of *Parasola crataegi*, a tiny umbrella-like fungus that is new to Britain. The species was first described in 2017 from samples in Germany and Hungary. However, back-checking has since revealed that it was collected at Heartwood at the edge of Langley Wood even earlier in 2012 and wrongly identified as the closely-related *Parasola kuehneri*. A stored sample was subjected to DNA analysis, confirming it to be *P. crataegi*. The sample has been deposited in the fungarium at Kew Gardens. Meanwhile, the annual Heartwood fungi walk continued to increase the total number of species seen. In 2026 an ectoparasitic fungus, *Hesperomyces harmoniae*, was discovered growing on the surface of a Harlequin Ladybird!

The number of monitoring programmes carried out by our volunteers is set to increase with involvement in a four-year study by Forest Research UK. Heartwood is one of 32 sites selected across the country where differences between old and new woodland transects using a range of measurements will be collected. At Heartwood the natural regeneration areas adjacent to old woodland are of particular interest.



Yellow Wagtail, Ashwell, April 2025 (Photo, Keith Gypps)

Varied parameters such as bird activity, leaf litter decomposition rates, soil nutrients and below-ground biodiversity will be monitored contributing to the overall project evaluating the rate at which the differences between areas alter as trees mature.

Herts Bird Club The club promotes the study and recording of birds in Hertfordshire and encourages a wider interest in natural history, including the conservation of wildlife habitats. The county bird recording team provides speedy verification of most records submitted through its website. The publication of recent (usually same-day) sightings on the website provides a resource that is highly valued by birdwatchers. Verification of species that are rare in Hertfordshire is referred to the club's panel of experts and – in the case of national rarities – the British Birds Rarities Committee. *The Hertfordshire Bird Report* is published annually by HNHS as the companion volume to *The Hertfordshire Naturalist*. Provisional figures for 2025, show that 14,747 bird records covering 201 species were submitted to the club's website. Some records await final verification. The club also oversaw annual surveys of Hertfordshire Swift nests, when 1,084 were recorded, and Rook colonies where 4,380 nests were recorded from 223 rookeries. Members and others taking part in the club's countywide Christmas Bird Count identified a best-ever total of 118 species. Annual tracking data was also published for the arrival of spring migrants. The well-attended 2026 Hertfordshire Bird Conference (see below) provided another highlight of the year.

Herts Bryophyte Group The group met monthly from the autumn months until spring. In 2025-26 there were seven field meetings . These recorded at a range of Local Wildlife Sites, HMWT Reserves and privately-owned woodland and parkland (see Recorders' Reports in this issue p. 15). The number of participants was



Grey-cushioned Grimmias, Bishops Wood, November 2025 (Photo, David Hunt)

generally five to seven. For several of the sites there were no previous bryophyte records; others had not been monitored for 30 years or more. This made comparisons in the species occurrence, particularly epiphytes, particularly interesting.

The Herts Flora Group the group held six formal field meetings in 2025 at sites around the county, with records submitted to the relevant databases. These meetings benefit increasingly from relationships forged between county recorders and local landowners who receive feedback in the form of species lists and management recommendations where appropriate. Additional field meetings were held to survey the flora of specific habitats or nature reserves seen as targets for concerted conservation measures (flora recorders' report p. 58). The group started 2026 in traditional style with a New Year Plant Hunt in Hatfield, complementing similar events at many locations throughout Britain and Ireland. County recorders also engaged in activities to equip volunteers and members of conservation organisations and consultancies with improved identification skills (the 'Identiplant' course) and to formally assess the botanical expertise of amateurs and professionals through the Field Identification Skills Certificate (FISC) scheme. Both the Identiplant and FISC schemes are now coordinated by BSBI (the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland), ensuring consistency in content and assessments on a national scale.

Prompt verification (or not) of plant records submitted by professional or amateur botanists remains an important part of the workload of county recorders. The challenge of this task is increasingly compounded by the proliferation of data-input portals accessible to the general public, but it remains just about manageable. During 2025, we extensively tested beta versions of an online recording App



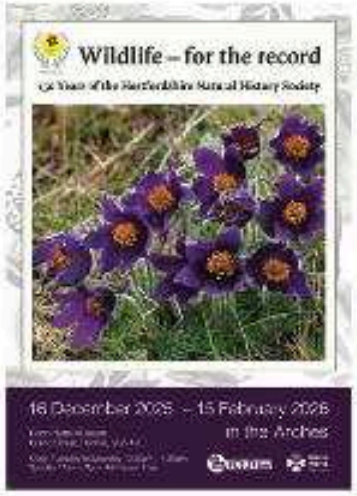
Great Willowherb, Silvermeade, August 2025 (Photo, Paul Gymer)

developed by BSBI, enabling direct input of records to their national botanical database. One remaining constraint to efficient exploitation of increasing botanical data for practical and scientific purposes is the existence of multiple databases with little connectivity. Negotiations are underway between the Herts Environmental Records Centre, the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, and BSBI to produce a data-sharing agreement allowing full and mutual access to all botanical data relevant to the county.

HNHS 150th Anniversary Exhibitions

Wild about Hertfordshire, the celebratory exhibition at St Albans Museum to mark the Society's 150th anniversary, received detailed coverage in the *Hertfordshire Naturalist 2025*. Between 21 March and 6 July it attracted more than 17,000 visitors. There was extensive coverage of the HNHS 'sesquicentenary' in local and regional media, including the BBC, and many positive comments were left by visitors to the exhibition. Children featured prominently among those who left 'post-it' note pledges saying how they planned to help Hertfordshire's wildlife in future.

A second successful exhibition, *Wildlife – for the Record*, took place at the North Hertfordshire Museum in Hitchin from 16 December 2025 to 1 March 2026. Although smaller in scale than the St Albans exhibition, it was presented with a focus on wildlife and habitats special to the north of the county. More than 12,000 individuals visited the museum during the time the exhibition was open; a record attendance for that time of year. Particular thanks go to Matthew Platt and Ros Allwood at the Museum and to Graham White and Mike Ilett who gave well-attended wildlife talks on (respectively) 'Have I Got Poos for You' and 'Birds of North Hertfordshire'. The HNHS is most grateful to the anonymous local member who funded a January reception at the museum, attended by Nicholas







(left to right) Hitchin exhibition poster, exhibit on Chalk grassland, Graham White's New Year talk (Photos, David Utting)

Buxton, the High Sheriff of Hertfordshire, and the Chair of North Hertfordshire District Council, Cllr. Keith Hoskins. David Utting gave a short talk about the Society's anniversary to around 50 members and their guests.

Publications

Transactions of the Hertfordshire Natural History Society 2025, Volume 57

Part 1: The Hertfordshire Naturalist 2025 was published in October 2025. Thanks go to Stuart Warrington for assembling the special 150th anniversary edition, and his editorial helpers Agneta Burton and David Utting.

Part 2: The Hertfordshire Bird Report 2024 was published in November 2025. Thanks go to the editor, Clifford Smout and his team.

Events

Autumn Meeting and 150th Annual General Meeting

The conference on 18 October continued celebrations of the Society's 'big' anniversary and included its 150th annual general meeting. The special guest was Hertfordshire's High Sheriff, Nicholas Buxton, who talked about work taking place to increase biodiversity and conservation on the Easneye Estate near Ware, where his family farms. Another featured talk, by David Utting, looked back at the Victorian founders of the HNHS and compared their natural history interests, pursuits and methods with those of the present day. He went on to consider issues that advancing technology raises for the future of wildlife recording. There were further presentations from county recorder Roy Woodward on progress with the Hertfordshire survey of dragonflies and damselflies and from Alex Waechter, manager of the Herts Environmental Records Centre, on the mammals, amphibians and reptiles atlas (Herts MARA) survey. HNHS committee member Hanna Grimsdale announced the Society's plans for new initiative to engage county recorders and other experienced naturalists in mentoring young adult wildlife enthusiasts to help them develop their knowledge, identification and field skills. Nicholas Buxton added a surprise item to the conference agenda by awarding his High Sheriff's Certificate for valuable community service to Tim Hill. Tim, who is Conservation Manager at the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, has also been the Events Organiser for HNHS and the Herts Bird Club for 30 years.

Gerald Salisbury Memorial Lecture

Hertfordshire's wild orchids were the topic for the 2026 lecture given on 22 January by Prof. Ian Denholm, a national authority who is also co-county flora recorder. Ian explained that out of 28,000



Nicholas Buxton awarded his High Sheriff's Certificate for valuable community service to Tim Hill (Photo, David Utting)



Ian Denholm lecturing on 'Wild Orchids of Hertfordshire' (Photo, David Utting)

orchid species worldwide, only 51 are known in Britain and Ireland and just 22 have been identified in Hertfordshire. His lecture, written jointly with fellow expert Prof. Richard Bateman, gave an overview of all the extant species plus seven others that have disappeared in the past 60 years. These ranged from the Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* that is thriving in a warming climate to the very rare Military Orchid *Orchis militaris* that flowered on a Herts. gravel extraction site for two years before being destroyed in 2020. A species that appears to be extending its range into Herts. is the impressive Lizard Orchid *Himantoglossum hircinum*. By contrast, the Burnt-lip Orchid *Neotinea ustulata*, once found at Therfield Heath, and the Marsh Fragrant-orchid *Gymnadenia densiflora*, formerly known at a site near Ardeley, have not been found in the county for more than 30 years. Ian explained that difficulties predicting where and when some species will be found relate to their tiny seeds, which can be wind-blown over long distances, and their need for a symbiotic relationship with mycorrhizal fungi. Often germination requires the presence of one type of fungus, while growing a leaf rosette requires another. It can be several years before flowering takes place. The lecture, jointly organised by HNHS and the Welwyn Natural History Society, took place at Welwyn Civic Centre in front of more than 50 members of the two societies. A video of the presentation can be viewed on the HNHS YouTube site.

Herts Bird Club/British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Conference

The 2026 Hertfordshire Bird Conference attracted a full house of members on Saturday 7 March. Keynote speaker Graham Knight talked about the positive action being taken in Hertfordshire to create new nesting spaces for Swifts and protect existing sites. The starting point has been continuing efforts to locate nests, using new and improved survey methods. Conservation work includes action to install 'Swift boxes' and 'Swift bricks' as a replacements for spaces in walls and roofs where the birds were formerly able to nest. Graham and fellow campaigners are applying pressure on local authorities to make the inclusion of 'Swift bricks' in new-build homes a condition of planning permission. Graham went on to present his regular review of significant Herts bird sightings during the previous year. Subject to acceptance by the National Rarities Committee, those for 2025 include a Baikal Teal, native to eastern Russia, found at Wilstone Reservoir. If verified, it will be a Hertfordshire 'first', as will a Lapland Bunting found at Stanborough gravel pits. Sadly, it was the first year no sightings of Turtle Dove were recorded and there was just one record of Tree Sparrow, four years after the last breeding colony at Tyttenhanger became extinct.

The conference heard from Jess Stokes, organiser of new British Trust for Ornithology survey of birds in urban greenspaces. This was launched in April 2026 as a 'citizen science' project to monitor the under-studied bird life of parks, playing fields, cemeteries, village greens and other public spaces. Alex Waechter, Manager of the Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre (HERC) gave a talk describing the journey taken by a record after it has been submitted through the Bird Club website. This includes verification, 'databasing', when records are brought together using specialist software, and analysis to produce useful information about species populations and other trends.

Hertfordshire BTO representative Martin Ketcher reported on the contribution of county birders to the annual Breeding Birds Survey (BBS), the new Winter Birds Survey (WBS) and other national surveys. He noted that a number of survey tetrads are not currently covered and appealed for more volunteers. Attendees



Winner of the Hertfordshire Bird Photograph of the Year – Firecrest, Chipperfield Common, November 2025 by Dave Hutchinson



Mike Ilett recieves the 1875 Award from Nicholas Buxton (Photo, Tim Hill)



Haydon Bailey, leading geologist, received the Society's Trevor James Award from Nicholas Buxton (Photo, David Utting)

also voted for the Hertfordshire Bird Photograph of the Year, won by Dave Hutchinson's pin-sharp photograph of a tiny Firecrest. The HNHS and Herts Bird Club are, once again, grateful to Affinity Water who hosted the Bird Conference and the Autumn Meeting conference at their headquarters in Hatfield. Thanks, as ever, go to Tim Hill, our Events Organiser. The conference talks can be viewed on the HNHS YouTube website.

The HNHS Awards for 2025

Haydon Bailey, a leading geologist, received the Society's Trevor James Award for an outstanding Hertfordshire natural historian at the Autumn Meeting. Dr Bailey is a national authority on chalk strata and fossils and Chair of Hertfordshire Geological Society which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2025.

The 1875 Award for an outstanding contribution to natural history in Hertfordshire went to Mike Ilett, a former Chair of Herts Bird Club. He is Secretary to the county rare birds panel and also a co-author of *Birds of Hertfordshire*, published by the HNHS in 2015.

Both winners received their award crystals from Nicholas Buxton, the High Sheriff of Hertfordshire. Further information about both winners can be found on the HNHS website.

Financial review

The Society's 2024-25 accounts, as approved by the 2025 AGM, can be viewed at *https://www.hnhs.org/contact-us/hnhs-management-committee*.

Volunteers

The Society is managed and run entirely by volunteers. We are grateful to all our volunteers for their continuing hard work, not least the county recorders, the editors of our two journals and those moderating and updating the websites.

Members' news

With great sadness, we record the death in May 2026 of Janet Gladwin, aged 88. Janet was accomplished amateur naturalist and one of the first women to qualify as a bird-ringer in the county. Alongside her husband of more than 70 years, the Revd. Tom Gladwin, she co-authored published papers on birds, moths and butterflies. We were also very sorry to learn of the death of Alan Outen, a long-serving County Recorder for Fungi and an expert on many aspects of natural history. Obituaries are included in this journal. (pp 69-71)

Congratulations go to HNHS member Nic Wilson on the publication in June 2025 of her autobiographical book *Land Beneath the Waves*. This describes how a deep love of nature has helped her cope with health-related adversity. Nic, who contributes to *The Guardian* newspaper's Nature Notes, has generously donated profits from selling her book to HNHS members to the Society.



Nic Wilson, author of 'Land Beneath the Waves'. (Photo Steve Grainger)

Structure, governance and management

The Society is a Registered Charity, governed by a formal constitution.

The Trustees of the Society are elected each autumn at the Annual General Meeting. In October 2025, 13 members of the Society's Management Committee were elected at the AGM (see table below).

During the year the Committee met five times, in April, July, September, November and February. Membership of the Society grew by more than 10 per cent to a peak of 560 at the end of 2025, including family members.

Members of the Management Committee elected in November 2024 and October 2025

Role	2024/25	2025/26
Chair	Peter Tallantire	Peter Tallantire
Treasurer	Chris Ruis	Harry Tallantire
Secretary and Registrar	David Utting	David Utting
Membership Secretary	Martin Ketcher	Martin Ketcher
Chair of Recorders' Committee	Veronica Edmonds-Brown	Veronica Edmonds-Brown
Editor, Hertfordshire Naturalist	Stuart Warrington	Stuart Warrington
Events	Tim Hill	Tim Hill
Herts Bird Club	Rupert Evershed	Rupert Evershed
Recording	Agneta Burton	Agneta Burton
Recording	Ian Carle	Ian Carle
Recording	Alex Waechter	Alex Waechter
Special projects	Chantal Helm	Hanna Grimsdale
Special projects	Chris James	Chris James

All elected committee members are also trustees of the charity. Toby Hill was co-opted to the committee to oversee website improvements.

Administrative information: The Society's registered address is 250 Sandridge Road, St Albans, AL1 4AL.

HNHS Management Committee
Draft dated August 2026 for presentation at the Society's AGM