

HERTFORDSHIRE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

HNHS/67M

67th Management Committee Meeting

Tuesday 11 January 2022 at 19.30 via internet conferencing

Present: Agneta Burton, Ian Carle, Judy England, Jack Fearnside Dan Fletcher (Treasurer), Alan Gardiner, Chantal Helm, Tim Hill, Chris James, Martin Ketcher, Peter Tallantire (Chair), David Utting (Secretary) and Alex Waechter

1. Apologies for absence:

Apologies received from Ronni Edmonds-Brown and Rupert Evershed

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 October 2021 were approved. Matters arising:

- a. Protecting Tyttenhanger's Tree Sparrows: David read a message from Rupert reporting that both HNHS and HBC submitted comments objecting to Hertsmere Borough Council's draft Local Plan in early December. The submissions had included a spreadsheet prepared by Alex at HERC of all the scheduled and Herts-rare species that have been recorded on or around the proposed development site. Thanks to various local campaigns there had been a large public response to the consultation which would hopefully result in a significant rethink. Only two Tree Sparrows had been regularly seen in the traditional hedge by Tyttenhanger Farm this winter. Neither appeared to be PIT tagged so their movements at feeders could not be tracked. Another bird found dead in a nest box appeared to carry a ring from another programme. This suggested that while Tyttenhanger may lose birds to post-breeding dispersal, others may attempt to join the population. Rupert would be meeting with Rob Forbes, the ecologist employed by the site's would-be developers, to continue discussions about a mitigation strategy.
- b. Covid: David said he had edited the website advice about preventing Covid transmission down to a single sentence encouraging responsible behaviour, with a link to Government advice. In the light of continuing high levels of transmission of the Omicron variant, it was agreed that the Gerald Salisbury Memorial Lecture on 23 February should take place online, rather than as a public meeting at Welwyn Civic Centre. There might be a modest cancellation charge for the hall. Tim agreed to liaise with the lecturer, Haydon Bailey, and co-organisers Welwyn Natural History Society about the change. It was agreed that the lecture should be advertised to the Hertfordshire Geology Society, of which Dr Bailey was Chair. Dan agreed to host the online lecture on Zoom.

Action: Tim, David, Dan

A discussion followed about the scope for future 'hybrid' meetings, where those attending a live event were joined by an online audience. Tim said experience had demonstrated the importance of using good quality equipment for the online stream. Affinity Water, who previously hosted the Society's conferences at their offices, were still not allowing access to external organisations. But he would talk to them about the scope for a 'hybrid' HNHS AGM in the autumn

Action: Tim

- c. Long-service award: No suitable date had yet been found for presenting Ray Uffen with his award. Given the current situation with Covid David did not expect any progress before the spring.
- d. Letter to MPs re. proposed JNCC changes to protected species schedules: A number of Herts MPs had forwarded responses from Defra Ministers to the letters that David and other MC members had sent objecting to suggested changes. St Albans MP Daisy Cooper had also tabled two written Parliamentary questions. The replies were encouraging to the extent that the JNCC had agreed to an extended consultation period and that the Government proposed to issue its own consultative Green Paper on species protection. A letter from Defra Secretary, George Eustice to Hertsmere MP Oliver

Dowden emphasised that no decisions had been taken. Alex added that the JNCC consultation now ran until the end of January and sought comments on the selection criteria for protected species and comments on the existing species list. The Wildlife Trusts had collectively responded, and county recorders had been circulated by Ronni asking for their views. She said it appeared the JNCC was now interested in proposing a precautionary approach, where the threat of de-listing would be removed from almost all the scheduled species found in Herts.

3. Hertfordshire Naturalist 2022

Judy shared her new spreadsheet list of potential articles. She had already received one article and was keen to receive ideas for more. Commenting on a list of articles postponed from previous years, David said the continuing pandemic meant access to the HNHS rare book collection kept by UCL (at Kew Repository) was currently not possible. However, he and the UCL curator, Erika Delbeque, still planned to produce an article. He also suggested that the Heartwood Monitoring Group might wish to submit a long-term monitoring report since it was six years since the last one. Tim suggested an article on recent chalk stream restoration work and monitoring along the Mimram at Panshanger Park.

Action: David, Tim, Judy

4. New online membership scheme

Martin reported that Chris Dee had almost finished setting up the new web pages using the Member MOJO app. The app allowed all memberships – not just those arranged with direct payment via the website – to be managed from a central database. It would send out routine reminders for renewal and late payment. A Stripe account had been created to handle online payments alongside PayPal. He and David would be meeting Chris later in the week to review detailed workings of the app. It was hoped to go ‘live’ in the next few weeks.

Action: Martin, David

5. Dragonfly survey

Roy Woodward had provided a draft home page text and other information needed for a survey sub-site, but that David was also trying to arrange an online meeting with Chris Dee to sort out details. Chantal said she would be happy to offer advice based on her experience of the MARA sub-site.

Action: David, Chantal

6. Reports

- a) Chair: Peter congratulated everyone involved in organising the online AGM in late November. Although the attendance had been lower than previously, it had gone very smoothly.
- b) Treasurer: Dan confirmed that a Stripe account had been created to work with the new online membership scheme. He had hopes that Lloyds Bank were about to simplify the system for adding committee members who needed access to online account information. He was still trying to persuade Santander to mail statements to him rather than Peter.
- c) Secretary: David drew attention to new HNHS web pages on grasshopper, bush-crickets and allied species that had been prepared by Ian, linked to a pdf identification guide impressively illustrated with his own photographs.

David had submitted a letter on behalf of HNHS supporting HMWT’s bid for National Lottery to lease and manage Astonbury Wood(s) near Stevenage.

He and Ian Denholm had corresponded about a recent visit by the county plant recorders (Ian, Alla Mashanova and Astrid Biddle) to North Herts Museum’s extension. This houses herbarium specimens dating from the 19th century, including those donated by John Dony and Trevor James. They had been encouraged by the way the collection was preserved and by plans to build a new extension.

David apologised to Alex for belatedly discovering that the HNHS constitution, last updated in 2006, specified a maximum 12 trustees. He regretted that this meant she could not be added without a constitutional amendment approved by the next AGM. The committee agreed that copies of the

constitution should be circulated so members could consider what other changes might be needed to bring it up to date.

Action: David

- d) Membership Secretary: Martin reported that 12 new members had joined since the October meeting.

7. Recording and monitoring

- a) MARA: Chantal said work verifying 2021 records and on a 'gap analysis' to identify under-recorded tetrads was progressing well. New maps had been prepared to identify tetrads without records of particular species that were previously known to be present, as well as those with few records overall. David said he would write a news story for the website with the maps included as images and /or downloads.

Action: Chantal, David

- b) Invertebrate Group: Ian said meetings were taking place to plan this year's recording effort. The aim was to make field meetings more 'inclusive' by meeting in the evening as well as weekend. Last year had been disappointing with four out of eight scheduled field meeting cancelled because of rain. He agreed to take a look at the listed contacts on the website's land bugs page which needed updating following Joe Gray's move away from the area. Ian commended a forthcoming *Identification Guide to Garden Insects of Britain* by Dominic Couzens and Invertebrate Group member and photographer Gail Ashton (John Beaufoy Publishing).

Action: Ian

- c) HERC: Alex said recent work had concentrated on additional mammal, amphibian and reptile records. She was also in touch with Ian Denholm and Astrid Biddle about ensuring all necessary information had been digitised from Trevor James's record cards. The first, mapping phase of the Ancient Woodlands project had come to an end. A student intern would be starting work shortly to assist with prioritising Herts species of concern.

8. Meetings

- a) AGM reflections: Tim said the online AGM / Autumn Meeting had gone well, with well-received presentations, but the relatively low attendance of around 40 on the morning of Saturday 27 November was puzzling. Suggestions included was that the timing was longer than the 2020 online meeting and that the date might have been too close to Christmas. Peter suggested bringing the meeting forward to October / early November or even September. However, it would be depend on whether the annual accounts could be finalised that early. It was also important to avoid clashing with the HMWT's annual meeting. Tim said he would look at the options for 2022 with Dan as well as investigating the potential for a hybrid in-person / online meeting – see 2b above.
- b) Gerald Salisbury Memorial Lecture: See 2b above
- c) Bird club / BTO conference (19 March online): Tim said the programme had been finalized. Barry Trevis would talk on breeding peregrines, Graham White on the wetlands of the Lea Valley ('Rise and Fall of the Coot Mucker!'). Martin and Murray Orchard would provide the BTO survey round-up and Graham Knight would deliver the 'What Did You Miss?' round-up of Herts sightings in 2021.

9. Publications

David said stocks of the Moths and Flora atlases were running low and that it would probably become necessary later in the year to consider digital versions (whether printed or available only as an online pdf). Jack thought this should be possible. Peter hoped it would also be possible to have a more strategic discussion about future surveys and publications.

10. Any Other Business

Martin drew attention to the Mammal Society's national survey of Harvest Mice based on nest location. This had begun in October and would continue to the end of March. Alex said HERC had provided the data they already held to the organisers. Chantal agreed that it would be good to organise nest searches, particularly as it was the final year of the MARA survey, but that a co-ordinator was needed. It was agreed that a mailshot

to members and website publicity would be helpful. Chantal would send suitable wording to David. She would also contact Peter Oakenfull who was adept at locating Harvest Mouse nests.

Action: Chantal / David

Next meeting: 7.30pm on Tuesday 3 May 2022.

David Utting, HNHS Secretary.
21 January 2022