

HERTFORDSHIRE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

HNHS/68M

68th Management Committee Meeting

Tuesday 3 May 2022 at 19.30 via internet conferencing

Present: Ian Carle, Judy England, Rupert Evershed, Dan Fletcher (Treasurer), Chantal Helm, Tim Hill, Chris James, Martin Ketcher, Peter Tallantire (Chair), David Utting (Secretary) and Alex Waechter

1. Apologies for absence:

Apologies received from Agneta Burton, Ronni Edmonds-Brown and Jack Fearnside. Dan was thanked for hosting the online meeting on Zoom.

Peter reported with regret that Alan Gardiner had felt obliged to resign from the committee, because of increasing care responsibilities at home. He is continuing in his role as county Bird Recorder. The committee expressed warm thanks to Alan for all that he has contributed as an MC member.

It was also noted that Judy plans to move to Devon and will be leaving the committee later in the year. This year's *Hertfordshire Naturalist* will be her last as editor. She is in talks with a possible successor.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 January 2022 were approved. Matters arising:

- a. Update on protecting Tyttenhanger's Tree Sparrows: Rupert reported disappointing news that Tree Sparrows had almost disappeared from the site, with only two individuals reported in April. He thought it unlikely that the colony would survive given scientific evidence that sustainability required the presence of at least 20 birds. Contributing factors to the decline in recent years appeared to include disturbance by ditching, telephone engineering and gravel extraction contractors near the birds' former stronghold at Courser's Farm, and an influx of rival House Sparrows. However, it was hoped to keep the expanded network of Tree Sparrow feeding stations running until at least the end of summer. Hertsmere Borough Council had formally withdrawn its draft Local Plan in the face of widespread opposition, including the proposal for 6,000 new homes on and around the Courser's Farm site that HNHS / Bird Club had objected to. However, a new draft could eventually be expected. The would-be developers had so far paid for new feeding stations and work by a professional ecologist aimed at saving the Tree Sparrows. Confirmed loss of the colony could affect support for current efforts to protect Tyttenhanger as a site for wildlife. Tim underlined the importance of continued action to ensure the wider importance of Tyttenhanger was recognized by creating a 'best practice' wildlife reserve there, with public access. Alex suggested that this could be supported by renewed survey activity across multiple taxa.
- b. Covid: David proposed that the remaining website message urging caution (linked to Government advice) be removed. This was agreed.

Action: David

- c. Long-service award: David had spoken to Rosemary Eaton, Ray Uffen's niece, who hoped to find a suitable day for presenting him with his certificate. His increasing infirmity meant this would have to take place at his care home in Knebworth. Sadly her father – Ray's brother – had died earlier in the year, making it impossible for her to organise anything sooner.
- d. New online membership scheme: Martin reported that the new system enabling online card payments was ready to go 'live'. It was already generating reminders and acknowledgements for those paying by bank transfer or cheque who had been entered on the system. Alex volunteered to be the first member to renew by card, once the system was switched on, and would report back to Martin on her experience. Martin was thanked for his hard work. David would email all members to let them know the new system was operating.

Action: Alex, Martin, David

3. Hertfordshire Naturalist 2022

Judy reported making good progress with this year's reports and articles, including a 20-page update on wildlife monitoring in Heartwood Forest. The editing process was ahead of last year's schedule and the anticipated overall length was 80 pages.

4. Updating the HNHS constitution

Peter said the 2002 constitution had not been updated since 2007. A note, circulated to the committee before the meeting, identified areas in need of technical amendment to bring its procedural requirements into line with current practice. It also queried whether the stated objects of the charity:

To promote the study of and to advance public education in:

all branches of natural history,

and in:

all matters relating to the conservation of flora, fauna, habitats and geological features, particularly relating to Hertfordshire,

encompassed current HNHS and Herts Bird Club activities adequately. Peter wondered, in particular, whether they provided sufficient justification for direct involvement in conservation (such as the Tree Sparrow project at Tyttenhanger) and occasional submissions on planning proposals (notably objecting to the impact on wildlife at Tyttenhanger of the Hertsmere draft Local Plan). In discussion, Tim said comparable questions had been raised – in relation to Luton Airport expansion - when the current constitution was drafted in 2002. A conclusion had been reached that the Society's role should be one of gathering and recording objective data and making the resulting information available to policy makers and the wider public. It had been agreed that HNHS should not seek to duplicate the role of the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust's planning specialists. Otherwise, there was a danger that the Society's volunteer activities would be overwhelmed by requests for involvement in a vast range of planning proposals. Chantal, from experience of fielding multiple requests for planning interventions as Chair of the Herts Bat Group, agreed. Chris noted that Clause 4 of the constitution helpfully gave the Society power "to do all such other lawful things as are necessary for the achievement of the objects". Rupert thought there could be scope for updating the current objectives. Alex suggested they could already be read as justification for current efforts to protect wildlife at Tyttenhanger. Ian said that HNHS should not seek to become a campaigning organisation, but that it should be free to comment on proposals that were detrimental to wildlife conservation and recording when the need arose. Dan added that although 'campaigning' did not appear on the Charity Commission's list of accepted charitable activities, the Society's approved objects did clearly include educating the public about local conservation matters. David said he regarded the objection made to the Hertsmere draft Local Plan as an exceptional intervention in defence of the Bird Club's long-standing conservation work at Tyttenhanger. He received several requests a year for HNHS to become involved in planning issues. He either referred the contact to HMWT or occasionally alerted a committee member or recorder who had a personal interest in the issue. Changing the Society's constitutional objects would require Charity Commission approval, so it was sensible to consider whether HNHS could live with the existing wording. It was agreed that Peter, David, Tim and Ian should meet as a sub-group to draw up proposals for updating constitution for consideration by the full committee before they were submitted to the Annual General Meeting in November

Action: Peter, David, Tim , Ian

5. Proposal to wind-up HNHS Trading Ltd.

The trading company had been created in 2020 in the expectation the HNHS would become a contractor for work at Tyttenhanger to protect the Tree Sparrow colony, channelling funding from the would-be Bowman's Cross developers. Dan reminded the committee that alternative arrangements had been established that avoiding any need to involve HNHS financially. Although the company had never traded, he was still required to file annual reports and Corporation Tax returns. His proposals that the company be wound-up was unanimously agreed. Dan was thanked for his work on this.

Action: Dan

6. Updating the online Transaction archive

A proposal from Ian that all remaining issues of the *Hertfordshire Naturalist* and *Hertfordshire Bird Report* be scanned and prepared for publication on the HNHS website was accepted. This would cover the period from 2010 to 2021. Most of the remaining issues were in pdf format. Jack had provided a sample that Ian had successfully formatted so it could be proof-read (using Ian's bespoke software) and added to the online archive. It would, therefore, be possible for Ian and volunteer proof-readers to complete most of the work at minimal cost. Even if the most recent issues were held back from the website for a few years, it made sense to do the work now while the software was still compatible and volunteers who knew how to use it were available. The committee agreed that new issues of the journals should be held back for three years, once the work was complete, rather than the ten years currently applied. David noted that some expenditure would still be incurred scanning several hundred pages that were missing from the original set of archived Transactions. Ian and Jack were thanked for the time they were generously committing to the project.

Action: Ian, Jack

7. Dragonfly survey: website costs

David reported that a start had been made on creating a website for the survey, which was now underway. Roy Woodward had recently sent text for additional pages, including species identification, which would be added. Chris Dee had provisionally quoted £960 plus VAT for creating and installing an interactive, online mapping system for the project, which would automatically update as dragonfly records were verified. He was waiting to hear from Roy about specification details. The quoted price was agreed to be acceptable.

Action: David

8. Reports

- a) Treasurer: Dan said the finances continued to be in good shape
- b) Secretary: David noted that Alan Gardiner's resignation had created a vacancy for a trustee. Alex agreed to be appointed

Action: David

- c) Membership Secretary: Martin said 7 new members had joined in the past two months.

7. Recording and monitoring

- a) MARA: Chantal said the survey season was underway with a current focus on ponds, especially in the north of the county. Small mammal trapping would follow. It had not been possible to carry out a Harvest Mice nest survey in March, but the search would resume in the autumn.
- b) Invertebrate Group: Ian said a first field meeting of the season at the end of April had produced little of insect interest on a dull day, but a Green-winged Orchid had been found at a new site for Herts. Further meetings were planned at least monthly and a What's App group had been created for sharing sightings and other information.
- c) HERC: Alex said work on a habitat inventory for the county was progressing, with work still needed on mapping. The ancient woodland inventory had progressed to its next stage of carrying out historical research and a part-time project officer had been recruited. A project with the Badger Group to harmonise data sets was under way and she was talking to Agneta about providing the Woodland Trust with up-to-date records from Heartwood. New riverine criteria for Local Wildlife Sites – a project Trevor James had worked on – were being introduced applying a more scientific approach to describing stretches of river.

8. Meetings

- a) Gerald Salisbury Memorial Lecture (23 February): Tim reported that Haydon Bailey gave an excellent lecture on the past 100 million years of Hertfordshire geology that had been well received by the online audience of HNHS and Welwyn NHS members.

- b) Bird club / BTO conference (19 March): The online Bird Conference had also gone very well 'attended' by more than 70 people. Barry Trevis's talk on breeding Peregrines had recently been followed by an announcement that two eggs were being incubated on a bespoke platform that Barry had installed at St Albans Cathedral the day after the conference.
- c) Festival of Wildlife: Tim said the HMWT, with limited consultation, had decided that the two-day Festival of Wildlife events held annually at Panshanger Park pre-Covid would be discontinued. However, it was hoped that a one-day event at Panshanger on Sunday 26 June organized by Hertford Rotary Club with HMWT and Tarmac plc would turn into a 'mini-festival'. David had agreed to provide an HNHS bookstall and it was hoped to arrange a birdwatching point managed by the Bird Club.

Action: Tim, David, Rupert

9. Publications

David said there had been a recent 'run' of orders for Beetles of Hertfordshire and that stocks of the Moths and Flora atlases were also low. A conversation with Jack about further, digital print runs would be needed in the next few months.

Action: David

10. AOB: None

Next meeting: 7.30pm on Tuesday 12 July 2022.

David Utting, HNHS Secretary.
10 May 2022