

HERTFORDSHIRE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

HNHS/72M

72nd Management Committee Meeting

Tuesday 7 February 2023 at 19.30 at 250 Sandridge Road, St Albans AL1 4AL and online

Present: All - Agneta Burton, Ian Carle, Ronni Edmonds-Brown, Rupert Evershed, Jack Fearnside, Dan Fletcher (Treasurer), Chantal Helm, Tim Hill, Chris James, Martin Ketcher, Peter Tallantire (Chair), David Utting (Secretary), Alex Waechter & Stuart Warrington.

1. Welcome: Peter welcomed Stuart to the meeting and thanked him for taking over as editor of the *Hertfordshire Naturalist*.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 November 2022 were approved with one amendment to the HERC report requested by Alex. Matters arising:

a) Online membership scheme: Martin said the first experience of mass renewals in January using the new MemberMOJO system had mostly been positive. However, there had been problems with some members forgetting they already had Standing Orders in place and using the new, online facility to make duplicate payments by credit card. This had required refunds to be arranged through Dan. A reminder that subscriptions were due on 1 January had been sent out automatically in early December with a message that members with Standing Orders need not take further action. In consultation with David, he had now removed those with Standing Orders from the list of members being sent repeat reminders around the New Year renewal date. They would continue to receive an early December reminder, hoping this might prompt them to check their Standing Orders were still operative.

Martin had received 15 new membership applications since the last meeting. Running totals for the year so far showed 410 paid memberships covering 460 individual members. Another 112 were due to expire during the coming months. David said this suggested 2023 membership might eventually match or exceed the 510 members for 2022. Martin was thanked for his work introducing the new system.

b) Updating the online *Transactions* archive: Ian said he and David had completed spelling checks on scans of the missing parts, together with the four volumes for 2010 and 2011 for which there was no pdf version. He hoped to add the indexed scans to the online archive during February. David said one unexpected discovery was the difficulties optical character recognition (OCR) software had reading sub-headings in green and other colours in the modern *Transactions*. Ian planned to adjust the dictionary in his bespoke proof-reading software to reduce the number of frequent words (e.g. 'Hertfordshire') being flagged for checking. Ian and David were thanked for their work.

Action: Ian

c) Trustee appointments: Rupert said an initial approach to a potential successor for Dan had been encouraging. He and Dan would follow-up with the person concerned

Action: Rupert, Dan

3. Revisions to the HNHS constitution

Peter summarised the substantive changes to the constitution that had been agreed at previous meetings. These were brought together in a 'final' document that had been circulated before the meeting. In discussion, Chantal sought – and was offered – reassurance that the revised objectives for the Society had been checked against the Charity Commission's guidance on how to define charitable purposes. A few typographical errors were noted for David to correct. He reminded the committee that proposed changes relating to the name of the Society (removing "...and Field Club"), its objectives and its rules and procedures for handling conflicts of interest required formal approval from the Charity Commission. He was still uncertain from visiting the Commission's online communications portal whether the most effective way to obtain this – and present the changes for membership approval at an AGM – would be as amendments or as a new, revised constitution. He anticipated that the latter would be more straightforward but would find out what worked best using the

Charity Commission's online approval system. It was clear that any submission would need to be accompanied by notice of a formal resolution passed by the Society's Trustees. The committee, therefore, agreed unanimously:

That a revised constitution for the Society (as set out in the document 'Constitution, to be presented to the 2023 Annual General Meeting (autumn) for approval, subject to Charity Commission agreement') be submitted to the Charity Commission for approval and – subject to any changes subsequently agreed with the Commission – proposed for acceptance by the Society's membership at its 2023 Annual General Meeting.

Action: David

4. HNHS 150th anniversary (2025) and strategic planning

Peter introduced a preliminary conversation about celebrating the Society's 150th anniversary by suggesting it provided an opportunity to think strategically about the challenges and priorities for the next 10 or 20 years. He would draft and circulate a discussion document for the next committee meeting.

Action: Peter

He suggested that HNHS might want to produce a 150th anniversary publication on similar lines to an attractive book produced by the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society for its recent anniversary featuring 150 species specially associated with their county. David suggested that distinguished Herts naturalists might also be featured. Jack said it would be good to create a 150th anniversary logo. Special anniversary issues of the *Herts Naturalist* and *Herts Bird Report* were also suggested. Tim agreed that the approaching anniversary provided an opportunity to consider how the Society could secure its future by encouraging younger people from more diverse backgrounds to become actively involved, not least as county recorders. Bursaries for necessary training could be considered.

5. Proposal for a new Hertfordshire moths survey and atlas

Ronni introduced a previously circulated proposal from Colin Plant to update his 2008 *Moths of Hertfordshire*. The last available copy of the book had recently been sold, but beyond that the moth fauna of Britain and Hertfordshire had undergone substantial changes in the past 15 years. A large-scale increase in recording effort in Herts had meanwhile contributed to an improved data set. There was particular scope for an updated book to provide detailed coverage of micro-moths in both Hertfordshire and Middlesex, for which Colin was the recorder. Although the proposal was for a hardbound book, to be published after 2026, some elements of the publication might be made available online. Peter noted that although the proposal was timely and welcome it needed further thought, including contact with other organisations with a potential interest in sharing the costs, notably the Royal Entomological Society and the London Natural History Society. The committee decided to support the update in principle but without any commitment yet to proceed. Ronni and the Recorders' Committee would consider the proposal and discuss the practicalities with Colin in more detail.

Action: Ronni, Recorders' Committee

6. Reports

Chair: Peter reported, with sadness, that David Nellist, the former Herts recorder for spiders and a distinguished member of the national recording scheme, had died after a long illness. David had written to his wife Pat expressing the Society's condolences and was agreed that an obituary should be included in the 2023 *Hertfordshire Naturalist*.

Action: David, Ronni, Stuart

Treasurer: Dan said the Society's cash balance had been increased by transferring money from book sales and membership payments from the PayPal account.

7. Recording and monitoring

MARA: Chantal said the MARA team had concluded, after reviewing records received since 2015, that the mammals, amphibians and reptiles survey should be extended by two years to the end of 2024. This would allow time to conduct targeted surveys for particular species in tetrads where they had been recorded in the 1980s and 1990s but not so far during the current survey. Some sections of the atlas could be written before the end of the survey. It was hoped to publish in 2025 / 2026.

Invertebrate Group: Ian said a full programme of site visits was being planned for the coming season.

Recorders Committee: Ronni said the committee planned to hold their spring meeting face-to-face at Bayfordbury. Alex would be repeating her tutorial for recorders on using QGIS mapping software. The committee also planned to discuss how new people could be encouraged to become recorders, including training and action to redress a shortage of people with necessary taxonomic skills.

HERC: Alex said the Centre's current focus was on business planning and securing funding for the next five years. It was hoped to increase the number of staff by appointing a new data officer working on habitat recording. HERC would also be recruiting maternity cover for Alex as she was expecting her first child in June. The committee warmly congratulated her.

8. Meetings and events

- Gerald Salisbury Lecture, Welwyn Civic Centre, Wednesday 22 February: Tim said that the lecture's co-organisers at the Welwyn Natural History Society had booked the smaller hall at Welwyn Civic Centre whose maximum capacity was 80. It was doubtful that space would be available to serve drinks. The committee, nevertheless, looked forward to the lecture by Prof Brian Legg and Tim Wright of the Heartwood Monitoring Group.
- Bird Club – BTO conference: Tim reported that after consulting Affinity Water about the availability of their facilities the conference date had been changed to Saturday March 4. Josh Kalms of HMWT would present on the bird life of Stocker's Lake and Paul Noyes from the BTO would talk about the conservation of waders.
- Wildfest 2023: Tim said HMWT planned to hold an event in Cassiobury Park, Watford during early July that would be similar to the successful St Albans Wildfest in 2022. HNHS would, again, be invited to contribute a stall.
- Trevor James Memorial Symposium (Autumn 2023): David said he and Ian Denholm had prepared a list of potential ingredients for a conference. These included memories of Trevor to be contributed by long-standing HNHS colleagues as well a 'national' speaker to review Trevor's contribution to improved biological recording. Ian had volunteered to speak on Trevor's flora mapping in Herts, and it was recommended that a speaker for an equivalent assessment of his work on beetles be found. A further session could take Trevor's reports as county bird recorder in the 1980s as basis for a talk about Hertfordshire's changing avifauna. A concluding segment could consider how best HNHS and others could build on Trevor's legacy. In discussion, Chris suggested that Keith Alexander, a leading coleopterist with whom Trevor often corresponded, might be invited to give a beetles talk. She also noted that Trevor's published bird records for Cuffley and Northaw Great Wood went back as far as his schooldays. David had sought quotes from the Rothamstead conference centre and the University of Hertfordshire's Fielder Centre that he anticipated would be beyond any reasonable budget. He thanked Tim for his offer to check the September availability of Redbourn Community Centre, which had recently installed high quality projection and PA equipment. Welwyn Civic Centre and Woolmer Green Village Hall offered further options. He also endorsed Tim's suggestion that tea, coffee and cake be provided by HNHS but that participants be invited to bring their own, packed lunches.
Action: David, Tim
- Autumn Meeting and AGM: It was noted that timing of the Trevor James Symposium would be factor to consider when selecting a date for the 2023 AGM in October or November.

9. Publications

Looking at timings for future publications, the committee noted the following:

2025:	150 th Anniversary book
2025/6:	Mammals, Amphibians and Reptiles Atlas (MARA)
2027/8:	Moths Atlas
2028/9:	Dragonflies Atlas

David had talked to Ian Denholm about options for a flora publication now that a Trevor James's 2009 atlas was sold out. There was currently no realistic possibility of conducting a new Hertfordshire plants survey and a re-print of the existing atlas would be expensive. A better alternative might be to make the existing book available online, together with subsequent flora updates from the *Herts Naturalist*. Jack agreed to investigate the practicalities.

Action: Jack, David

The committee noted that David Carr was compiling a checklist of spiders recorded in Hertfordshire for the *Herts Naturalist* and that this might eventually lead to an atlas project.

Stuart said that in addition to the checklist proposal he had so far received articles for the 2023 *Herts Naturalist* from Robin Cole on river flies and from Judy England on macroinvertebrate habitat associations in chalk streams (the latter was overmatter from the 2022 issue). Keith Davies had offered an article on nematodes. David said he would send Stuart a note about obituaries and possible authors.

Action: David

10. AOB

The committee agreed with Peter's suggestion that Peter Delaloye, who had recently resigned from the Bird Club Committee, should be presented with the Society's new award for long-service. Jack agreed to prepare a certificate.

Action: Jack, David

Next meeting: 7.30pm on Tuesday 16 May 2023.

David Utting, HNHS Secretary.
19 February 2023