

# HERTFORDSHIRE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

HNHS/73M

## 73<sup>rd</sup> Management Committee Meeting

Tuesday 16 May 2023 at 19.30 at 250 Sandridge Road, St Albans AL1 4AL and online

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

### 1. Apologies: Ian Carle

### 2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 February 2023 were approved. Matters arising:

- a) Trustee appointments: Peter reported that Chris Ruis had agreed to become HNHS Treasurer. Dan Fletcher, who is now living in Gloucestershire, had kindly agreed to complete work on the accounts for 2022-23.
- b) Revised HNHS Constitution: David said he had submitted the changes proposed at the last meeting to the Charity Commission using their digital gateway.
  - i) The change of name to 'Hertfordshire Natural History Society' (deleting 'and Field Club') had been approved with immediate effect. The name had already been simplified as part of the 2002 Constitution, so it appeared the Commission was correcting its own error in not changing the name 20 years ago.
  - ii) The re-wording of the Society's objectives had been rejected on grounds that it was unclear what it would achieve that could not already be carried out under the existing objectives. David was surprised by the response, but suggested it be taken as solid evidence that the Commission considered the Society's activities were constitutional without the wording amendment
  - iii) The Commission had accepted all the other changes acceptable, including the amended clause on conflicts of interest. They had received blanket consent as 'administrative' changes.
  - iv) The Commission had given approval for the Society to add a 'standard' clause to the constitution covering trustee benefits. The clause (circulated to trustees before the meeting and attached to these minutes) sets out limited circumstances in which a trustee may enter a contract for the supply of services and receive payment. It was agreed the clause be proposed for inclusion with all the other constitutional amendments at the 2023 Annual General Meeting

It was agreed that David should draft the motions needed to amend the constitution and present them to the next meeting before they were circulated to the membership for AGM approval in the autumn.

*Action: David*

- c) 2023 Hertfordshire Naturalist: Stuart said there would be three main papers: chalk stream macroinvertebrates and habitats (Judy England), a checklist of Hertfordshire spiders (David Carr) and mosses at Wilstone (Astrid Biddle). Robin Cole was writing a paper on riverflies found in the Mimram but it was unlikely to meet the deadline for this year. Recorders' report were expected on butterflies, ants, dragonflies, bryophytes and geology. There was likely to be enough material, but if necessary short articles could be commissioned on recent interesting records. It was suggested that Mark Sterling be asked to compile a photo feature on moths being trapped at Heartwood. Alex thought Emily Baker, the ancient woodlands inventory officer at HERC, might be willing to write about her project. David said he had written an obituary for the late David Nellist and that another on Nigel Agar was being co-ordinated by Martin. As in previous years, it was planned to publish the journal in late September or early October.

### 3. HNHS 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary (2025) and strategic planning

Peter introduced a discussion document (attached), circulated before the meeting, on ways of ensuring the continued relevance of the Society as it approaches its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2025. The paper recommends identifying strategic priorities and areas in where HNHS volunteers and money can add most value to supporting natural history in Hertfordshire. It suggests a focus on priorities for the short-term (to 2025) medium-term (2030) and long-term (2050). The document identifies the Society's unique contribution as its role in capturing and studying wildlife data trends and in sharing that knowledge through publications. Unique strengths include the network of recorders, the Society's journals and the publication of county atlases for different taxa. But while the HNHS might aim to ensure expanding knowledge concerning Hertfordshire wildlife is widely available and easily accessed, it faces risks for the future. These include a shortage of expert recorders and difficulty attracting new, younger members to carry on its work. Strategic priorities might, therefore, include filling existing gaps in the recorder network, encouraging and supporting the recorders of the future and – more generally – focusing on under-recorded areas and species groups.

Peter suggested the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary was an opportunity to remind people what the HNHS does, demonstrate its importance and build momentum for the future. Activities could include a special conference built around a vision for the Society's future work and a special publication. This might include the Society's history, 150 special 'Hertfordshire' species, 150 years of notable Herts naturalists and descriptions of some of the county's top wildlife sites.

Points made by committee members in discussion included:

- An opportunity to underline the importance of HNHS recording to aggregate data used for the national and county 'State of Nature' reports. Future reporting would be in doubt if the Society's work did not continue to thrive.
- Accompanying potential for highlighting the contribution that verified wildlife records make (via HERC) to conservation. Reasons for the Society's policy of not normally commenting on planning and development proposal might usefully be clarified to discourage interested parties from interpreting the absence of a formal HNHS response as tacit approval or indifference.
- Opportunities must be seized to encourage children and young people to enjoy natural history and ensure that identification skills do not die out with existing generation of recorders.
- Accredited learning schemes like FSC courses and Identiplant can help bridge the gap between a general interest in wildlife and more specialist field and identification skills.
- Field study trips, such as those organised by the Society's specialist groups, the Herts BNA and the RSPB branches are another valuable way of accelerating people's interest in finding and identifying wildlife. The HNHS website could promote these and other field trips more prominently.
- Social media can be a good way to draw people in. Herts BNA have made use of attractive photographs on Instagram to attract new, younger members. Facebook groups for places (e.g. Tyttenhanger) and species groups (e.g. dragonflies) help reinforce interest.
- Enthusiasts who submit records for birds, mammals, butterflies, dragonflies and other 'popular' species could be encouraged to extend their interests into identifying more 'difficult' groups.
- Bursaries could be made available to help those with a serious interest in developing their field skills to county recorder level. These could be part-funded by Trevor James's generous bequest to HNHS.
- The social side of recording provides important reinforcement. The long-standing community of wildlife enthusiasts collecting records at Hilfield Park and the Heartwood Monitoring Group are good examples.
- The Bird Club's successful garden-based competitions during lockdown might be extended to interest people in studying all the wildlife in their gardens ('garden bioblitzes')
- The national online recording scheme, iRecord, is an increasingly powerful tool for not only submitting records and photographs but also facilitating dialogue with identification experts who

provide helpful and encouraging feedback. iRecord verifiers are well-placed to identify enthusiasts who submit multiple records and steer them towards more specialist training, including fieldwork invitations.

- The access that iRecord provides to verification by national or regional experts makes gaps in the county recording network potentially less critical. For some ‘difficult’ species groups the future role of county recorder could be that of referring-on records rather than providing their own verifications.
- Online apps using artificial intelligence are likely to offer increasingly sophisticated routes to identifying specimens from photographs (if visual identification is possible).

It was agreed that a small group should meet to elaborate ideas for a 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary strategy document and for a publication to celebrate the milestone anniversary in 2025. Peter, Ronni, Tim and David volunteered to take part.

*Action: David, Peter, Ronni Tim*

It was also agreed that Society members should be engaged in discussions about the strategy at the September 9 conference in memory of Trevor James (see below).

#### **4. Reports**

Chair: Peter announced that he would be nominated to become Chair of the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust at their October AGM. He did not think there would be any conflict of interests, but he would be willing to stand down as HNHS Chair if committee members disagreed. He was not inviting an immediate response.

Treasurer: In the absence of Dan and Chris Ruis, Peter reported that the society’s finances remained healthy.

Secretary: David and Peter had responded, on behalf of the Society, to concerns raised by Barry Trevis about the threat to protected breeding Peregrine Falcons from plans for a June charity fundraising event abseiling down the YMCA building in Watford. As the email was about to be sent, the YMCA reacted to representations from the RSPB Investigations Unit and agreed to postpone the abseiling until after the breeding season. An amended message had been sent supporting the postponement and encouraging the YMCA to work closely with Barry on safeguarding the Peregrines. A supportive statement for the YMCA’s press release announcing their re-think was also sent.

David also reported plans in the coming week to present former Hymenoptera (aculeata) recorder Raymond Uffen with his HNHS Long-Service Certificate. This would take place at his care home in Knebworth. Because of Covid restrictions and other difficulties it had taken three years to finalise a presentation. Ray’s nieces would be present and Ronni also hoped to attend.

Membership Secretary: Martin said that 11 new members had joined the Society since the last meeting.

#### **5. Recording and monitoring**

MARA: Chantal said ‘mini-bioblitz’ events were planned in North Herts at Hawkins Wood and Blagrove Common overnight on 22 & 23 July and 26 & 27 August. Small mammal trapping and bat recording would take place.

Invertebrate Group: In Ian’s absence, Stuart reported that a full programme of field meetings was underway and has already produced new or interesting records. A recent meeting at Archer’s Green had been well-attended.

Recorders Committee: Ronni said the committee had met the previous week. A picnic was planned for the summer to enable county recorders – who had been meeting online since the Covid outbreak – to meet socially. Replying to a question from Chris about arrangements for recording beetles, Stuart said records were being collected, but it was clear no one locally who could match the late Trevor James’s experience and expertise. There was a comparable ‘gap’ in the recorder network for terrestrial bugs and true flies, which

were also large groups containing thousands of species. This underlined the increasing value of being able to forward records that were difficult to determine to national experts via iRecord for verification.

HERC: Alex said the Centre had conducted more than a thousand requested searches in 2022-23, most of which related to planning and development or local environmental study groups seeking information. A large batch of iRecord records for Herts was about to be delivered. Emily Baker, HERC's new Ancient Woodlands Inventory Officer was in post and making an impact. No maternity-cover replacement had yet been found for Alex, who was due to go on leave in early June.

## 6. Meetings and events

- Gerald Salisbury Lecture, Welwyn Civic Centre, Wednesday 22 February: Tim said a capacity audience had enjoyed an excellent presentation by Prof Brian Legg and Tim Wright on wildlife monitoring at Heartwood.
- Bird Club – BTO conference, Affinity Water, Hatfield, Saturday 4 March: The Bird conference had also attracted a capacity audience providing further proof that attendance at face-to-face events post-Covid was getting back to normal.
- Wildfest 2023, Cassiobury Park, Watford 2 July: Two HNHS member living in Watford had kindly volunteered to help with the HNHS stall. Help from MC members would be welcome. *Action: All*
- 'Dragonfly Hotspot' at Panshanger Park: HMWT would be holding an invitation-only event on 8 July and a public launch event on 29 July to celebrate the park's designation as a 'hotspot' by the British Dragonfly Society.
- Trevor James Memorial Symposium (Autumn 2023): David said keynote speakers had been agreed for the conference. Paul Harding would talk about Trevor's national contribution to biological recording, Ian Denholm on Hertfordshire flora, Stuart on Hertfordshire beetles and Ken Smith comparing Herts birds in the 1980s, when Trevor was county recorder, with the present day. A panel-led discussion was proposed for the final session on securing Trevor's legacy. This would feature the new HNHS strategy document (see above).
- Autumn Meeting and 2023 AGM: Tim proposed that this should take place on either 7 or 14 October (Note: 7 October at Affinity Water's offices in Hatfield was agreed following the meeting).

## 7. Publications

Jack said he was investigating costs for digital re-prints of *Flora of Hertfordshire* and *Beetles of Hertfordshire*, both of which are out of stock. One option to potentially reduce costs was a softer 'square back' binding. He would seek quotations for printing a minimum 50 copies of each.

*Action: Jack*

David said storage of unsold HNHS books at Bayfordbury might become an issue if the University of Hertfordshire decided it had other uses for the space. There were currently 150 Butterfly books and 250 Bird books stored there. Much of the space was taken by copies of the *Transactions* dating back to 1890. Now that the online archive of historic *Transactions* was complete, he hoped to combine the Bayfordbury journals with other 'spare' copies to create a second, complete set that could be offered to the Herts county archive or UCL Library.

*Action: David*

## 8. AOB

None

**Next meeting: 7.30pm on Tuesday 18 July 2023.**

David Utting, HNHS Secretary.  
22 May 2023