

HERTFORDSHIRE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

HNHS/77M

77th Management Committee Meeting

Tuesday 13 February 2024 at 250 Sandridge Road, AL1 4AL and online via Zoom conferencing

Present: Agneta Burton, Rupert Evershed, Tim Hill, Chris James, Martin Ketcher, Chris Ruis (Treasurer), Peter Tallantire (Chair), David Utting (Secretary) & Stuart Warrington.

1. Apologies: Ian Carle, Ronni Edmonds-Brown, Chantal Helm, Alex Waechter

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 November 2023 were approved. Matters arising:

a) Hertfordshire and Middlesex Moths Group website: David reported that work on the new website had been completed and it was up and running. The Society's requirements for funding the work had been met and the agreed fee of £5,800 had been paid. The site looked good and created a routinely updatable, online atlas for moth records. It included photo identification help, information on recording and distribution maps. Those wanting to view detailed maps had to pay a subscription to the site developer who used the money raised to maintain the site.

3. Policy on internal financial controls

Peter was thanked for drafting a policy document, working from a Charity Commission checklist and template for small charities. The Commission's advice left room for adjustment to suit the particular circumstances of the charity. For example, his draft did not include any requirement for financial monitoring against an annual budget. This was because HNHS had remained in long-term financial health and the variations in its income and expenditure from year to year tended to be small. Meeting-by-meeting updates that the management committee (trustees) received from the Treasurer satisfied monitoring requirements, together with the presentation of annual accounts to the committee for approval before each AGM. It would be the Society's policy that larger items of expenditure individually required trustee approval. The committee agreed that the threshold for this should be set at £5,000. It was also agreed that the Society should keep a list of equipment and other assets valued at more than £100. Peter, in addition, would include information in the policy about the Society's approach to investing part of its reserves and the way that suitable funds were selected. He would circulate a revised draft for approval at the next meeting.

Action: Peter

4. Hertfordshire's Nature Recovery Strategy

Tim introduced a discussion about the Government's requirement for local government areas to produce a nature recovery strategy. Hertfordshire County Council had received some central government funding to act as the 'responsible authority' for the county. This strategy will:

- map areas of habitat across Hertfordshire
- agree on local biodiversity priorities
- identify where practical action would be most beneficial to create, enhance or recover habitat.

The local aim was to produce a strategy "for Herts, by Herts" benefitting both nature and residents. This would identify priority habitats and species for conservation.

Local authorities are expected to take notice of the strategy, once agreed, when drafting Local Plans for development. The guidance called for strategies to be produced by March 2025. Governance for the strategy consisted of a quarterly Board meeting and a larger monthly Steering Group meeting. The steering group included representative from Natural England, the Environment Agency, HMWT, HERC and the Lea and Colne Catchment Partnerships (represented by Tim). So far, the steering group had met three times. HERC had been commissioned to carry out an initial 'mapping' exercise on key habitats and species.

Tim expressed concerns that the exercise lacked funding to take action on any conclusions about priority species and habitats. Landholders, who are key to delivery of action for nature (represented by an Officer from Gascoyne-Cecil Estates) were part of the partnership.

David read an email from Ronni voicing concerns from a number of county recorders that they would not be consulted until late in the process and that the strategy was a ‘tick-box’ exercise, unlikely to produce real benefits for wildlife and conservation. Chris J suggested the partnership should take note of the priorities already set out in Local Biodiversity Action Plans. Tim, who was thanked for his introduction, agreed to provide the committee with regular updates. David would circulate a set of HCC slides summarising the Nature Recovery Strategy aims and process for producing it.

Action: Tim, David

5. Plans for celebrating the 150th anniversary in 2025

Peter introduced a timeline he had prepared identifying potential key ingredients and timescales for planning and delivering the anniversary celebrations in 2025. These were:

- January to March: Gerald Salisbury Lecture, Bird Conference, Oral history project
- April to June: anniversary conference, anniversary exhibition
- July to September: anniversary edition of the Herts Naturalist, anniversary exhibition (second venue)
- October to December: Autumn Conference and AGM, Launch of HNHS 25-year strategy, Launch of refreshed website

Oral history: This was identified as an early priority that could feed into plans for one or more exhibitions. Some of the outstanding naturalists it would be important to interview were quite frail. It was agreed that a standard questionnaire was needed that could be given to anyone conducting an interview. Agneta suggested that the University of Hertfordshire’s oral history project might be contacted for advice. Tim suggested that in addition to recognising living naturalists, the anniversary year might also honour post-war ‘heroes of natural history’ who pre-dated the Society’s awards for outstanding work.

Action: David, Tim, Agneta

Exhibition: David reported that St Albans Museum – centrally housed in the old town hall – had responded positively to his suggestion that they might mount an exhibition for the anniversary. The curator had suggested looking at way the HNHS and natural history collections in museums had changed over time, long-term wildlife recording in Herts. and the growing popularity of bird watching. David had suggested the exhibition might also include some of the most attractive rare botany books in the Society’s collection (Pryor Bequest). University College London’s rare books department would allow them be displayed provided conditions for security, climate control and insurance were met. Suggested slots for the exhibition were March to June or July to November. The possibility of exhibitions at other times at North Herts Museum (Hitchin) and the Natural History Museum, Tring could also be explored. David, Agneta, Rupert and Peter would meet as an ‘exhibition’ sub-group.

Action: David, Agneta, Rupert, Peter

Tim’s suggestion that Affinity Water should be approached as a potential sponsor for exhibitions and other 150th anniversary activities was welcomed.

Action: Tim

Anniversary edition of *The Hertfordshire Naturalist*: Stuart anticipated that the special edition would need to be considerably longer than the usual annual publication, requiring ‘perfect’ binding. David said he would talk to Jack Fearnside about this and the potential cost. It was agreed that the existing editorial board – Stuart, Agneta and David – should oversee the special issue, supplemented by anyone who would like to help.

Action: David, Stuart, Agneta

HNHS strategy to 2050: Peter said he would continue to lead work on preparing a strategy document and liaise with Rupert and the Bird Club about the work they were conducting on how to secure its future.

Action: Peter, Rupert

Anniversary conference and other events: Tim and David would confer on a suitable programme and whether this might include an anniversary field meeting or ‘bioblitz’.

Action: Tim, David

6. Hertfordshire Naturalist 2024

Stuart said that if all promised articles were delivered there would no problem filling the issue. Substantial papers had been offered on nematodes (Keith Davies) and river flies (Robin Cole). There was the possibility of a large article on the Panshanger Park, beetles with himself as lead author. During a discussion about County Recorder’s biennial reports, another article was suggested about current gaps in recording expertise (for example, Diptera) and the changing role of county recorders as national verification schemes like iRecord became more widely used.

7. Reports

Treasurer: Chris reported that efforts to give him online access to the Lloyds Bank accounts had been frustrated by the bank sending the necessary paperwork to the former Treasurer, Dan Fletcher. The Society’s finances remained healthy. The two Lloyds accounts currently held around £15,000 with another £30,000 in the Santander account. There was a further £6,600 in the PayPal account.

Membership Secretary: Martin said it was a busy time of year with all subscriptions officially due on 1 January. After consultation with Peter and David he had decided to mark all members whose standing orders were paid via the Santander account as up-to-date without waiting for the account statements which were sent quarterly (to Peter). This would spare the relevant members from receiving unnecessary automatic reminders.

It was agreed, in discussion, that the committee should consider at the next meeting whether it made sense to keep the Santander account, or whether the remaining standing orders could be transferred straightforwardly to the Lloyds account.

Action: David, Peter, Chris

Secretary: David said he had been contacted by Val McLennan of Digital Routes (Scotland) recommending that HNHS should move its websites to a single, dedicated server in place of the existing web account where it was sharing server capacity. She suggested this would a recurrence of recent capacity problems affecting access to the verification pages for recorders. She had obtained a quote from Krystal, a web hosting company she considered suitable, of £19 a month including unlimited disk space, 3vCPUs, and 6GB of RAM. The committee agreed to proceed with this, subject to assurances that all data would be fully and regularly backed-up.

Action: David

3. Recording and monitoring

MARA: David had received a message from Chantal saying that the team would be planning new surveys soon.

Invertebrate Group: Ian had also sent a message to say that field meetings were being planned for the season

Recorders’ Committee: Ronni had emailed that the committee’s next meeting would be in the spring.

6. Meetings and events

- Gerald Salisbury Memorial Lecture, Wednesday 28 February, Welwyn Civic Centre. Tim said this year’s lecturer was Sarah Brockless, an ecologist from the Spains Hall Estate in Essex, who was overseeing its reintroduction of Eurasian Beavers. Members of the committee volunteered to arrive by 7pm to help set up the venue, including entry money collection and refreshments. David would organise cash floats and bring the point-of-sale card readers.

Action, David, Tim, All

- Herts. Bird Conference, Saturday 2 March, Affinity Water, Tamblin Way, Hatfield. The main speakers were Graham White on the birds of the Colne Valley wetlands and Rupert talking about the importance Stanborough gravel pits as a bird site. The Bird Club committee were organising volunteers to help run the conference. David had an unavoidable prior commitment, but would hand over all necessary items for collecting entry money and organising the raffle and bookstall to Tim.

Action, David, Tim, Bird Club Committee

7. Publications

David said he had begun distributing complimentary copies of *Birds of Hertfordshire* to secondary school libraries

8. AOB

None

Next meeting: 7.30pm Tuesday 7 May 2024 at 250 Sandridge Road, St Albans AL1 4AL (and online by request)

David Utting, HNHS Secretary.
26 February 2024