

HERTFORDSHIRE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

HNHS/81M

81st Management Committee Meeting

Tuesday 11 December 2024 at 250 Sandridge Road, AL1 4AL and online via Zoom conferencing

Present: Astrid Biddle, Agneta Burton, Ian Carle, Tim Hill, Ronni Edmonds-Brown, Rupert Evershed, Chris James, Martin Ketcher, Peter Tallantire (Chair), David Utting (Secretary)

1. Apologies and committee membership: Apologies were received from Hanna Grimsdale, Chantal Helm, Chris Ruis, Alex Waechter and Stuart Warrington. Peter welcomed Astrid to the meeting, and it was agreed she be co-opted as a (non-trustee) member.

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 September 2024 were approved. Matters arising:

- a) Bank accounts: Peter said Santander had stopped accepting payments into the Society's former Alliance and Leicester account. Martin would write to all the members affected, asking them to make new arrangements for their annual subscriptions to be paid into the Lloyds Bank account.

Action: Martin, Peter

3. 150th anniversary celebrations

David gave an update on progress organising next year's exhibition in St Albans Museum. Following a meeting with the curator, Sarah Keeling, it had been agreed the exhibition would run from 21 March to 6 July. There would be a private view on the evening of Friday 20 March. HNHS could invite up to 120 guests, with another 30 invited by the Museum, including the Mayor of St Albans, Cllr Jamie Day and the relevant cabinet member, Cllr Anthony Rowlands. The High Sherriff, Annie Brewster, had expressed interest in attending. It was agreed that local MPs should be invited.

Action: David

Sarah had approved almost all the committee's suggestions for exhibits. This included the proposed 3-D model of the River Ver showing the underlying chalk strata and characteristic chalk stream wildlife. Lee Wood, of Ember Designs, had been sent two 3-D drawings of the upper and lower reaches of the Ver, kindly provided by hydrologists at Affinity Water. He proposed to start designing early in January. Tim had, meanwhile, arranged a meeting with Danny Coffey and Alister Leggatt at Affinity to discuss support for the project, including possible sponsorship. Haydon Bailey of Herts Geological Society remained willing to help take a funding proposal to the Geologists' Association's Curry Fund once there was clearer information concerning the likely costs of the model.

Action: David, Tim

Based on conversations with the curator and Kate Bretherton, who used the same space for her 'Remarkable World of Trees' exhibition in 2022, David anticipated a total cost for the exhibition of between £5,000 and £10,000.

Plans to exhibit eight historic botany books from the HNHS collection kept at UCL were progressing well. A selection had been made and Erika Delbeque, the Head of Rare Books at UCL, was arranging for them to be checked by a conservator and evaluated for insurance (to be covered by the museum).

The committee discussed the choice of information to be included in a large, artistically-designed flow chart illustrating the role of HNHS, HERC and others in collecting and collating individual wildlife records to turn them into valuable information about Hertfordshire's wildlife for public education, conservation, planning and other local and national policy-making. Rupert was thanked for providing a draft chart listing various elements that the proposed designer, Chloé Harmsworth, could be asked to include. In addition to giving museum visitors an idea of the part that HNHS plays in citizen science, it was suggested the wall-chart be presented in a way that encouraged them to start recording their local wildlife.

Action: Rupert, David

David had visited the Museum's storage facility with Sarah and discovered a number of suitable items for the exhibits, including stuffed birds and mammals and wooden collection chests with draws of laid-out insect specimens. There were also some (non-working) magic lanterns of a type used at late 19th century HNHS meetings.

The main exhibit celebrating the work of the Bird Club would be a display of Hertfordshire Bird Photographs of the Year. Another wall exhibit would feature high-quality photographs of iconic Hertfordshire species. He was talking to Jack Fearnside and county recorders about choosing striking images, including those used in the Transactions. Photographs of the Pasque Flower and Hawfinch were required for display at the exhibition entrance, being the emblems of HNHS and the Bird Club respectively. Chris would send David the front cover image of a Pasque Flower from *Flora of Hertfordshire*.

Action: Chris, David

David asked whether Tim and others involved in preparing the Hertfordshire Nature Recovery Strategy might take a lead in proposing content for a 'future facing' exhibit identifying ways forward for protecting wildlife and biodiversity and inviting visitors to think what they could contribute. Tim said the draft strategy was due to be ready in March, with publication expected in April. He recommended consulting Marc Wilcox of Herts County Council, since the exhibit would be a good opportunity to promote the strategy's forward-thinking messages.

Action Tim, David

The museum curators were keen to involve HNHS in their Easter holiday programme of activities aimed at children and families. A number of suggestions were made including kick-sampling in the river Ver, Peregrine-watching at the Abbey and an introduction to bats with Roger Harvard, this year's winner of the 1875 Award. A herpetology session with Dave Willis, possibly with live Slow-worms, might also prove popular.

Action: David

David and Chris reported, with disappointment, that the North Hertfordshire Museum in Hitchin had moved the proposed dates for a small HNHS anniversary exhibition from autumn 2025 to the turn of the year. It would still be worth staging, using photos and wall exhibits from the earlier exhibition in St Albans.

Action: David, Chris

4. Hertfordshire Naturalist 2024 and Hertfordshire Bird Report 2023

The production of the Hertfordshire Naturalist had been delayed but was expected from the printers on 13 December; however, packing and dispatch might be delayed until around Christmas. The committee expressed gratitude to Helen Baker, Jack's former colleague at LTD Design, for seeing through the design and production process. They also thanked Jack for his work on the Bird Report, which had been printed and distributed in November as Part 1 of the new volume of HNHS *Transactions*. Clifford Smout, the editor, and his editorial team were congratulated on another successful issue.

5. Hertfordshire's Nature Recovery Strategy: update

HNHS members who attended the Autumn Meeting received a useful overview of the strategy planning process from Marc Wilcox of Herts County Council. Tim confirmed that the strategy was due to be finalised in March. Lists of 'flagship' Herts species (representative of their habitat) and 'bespoke' species (requiring specific intervention to thrive) were being agreed for inclusion on the advice of county recorders; likewise of key habitats. The draft strategy would need to be agreed by all ten Hertfordshire local authorities. Discussions were taking place about funding to implement the strategy and this was expected to prove challenging. The engagement of local landholders as stakeholders in the drafting process was a positive. There were outstanding questions over baseline data for evaluating the strategy's impact.

Reports

6. Chair: Peter noted the recent death of Raymond Uffen. Ray had been county recorder for Hymenoptera (aculeata) from 1993 to 2016 and had extensive knowledge across the whole of entomology. He had been presented with the society's long-service Award in May 2023. Details of his funeral in January would be circulated when available and there would be an obituary in the 2025 *Herts Naturalist*.

Action: David

Treasurer: In Chris's absence, Peter reported that the Society's finances continued to be on a sound footing.

Membership Secretary: Martin said the number of individual members had risen since the last meeting from 512 to more than 540. Rupert's campaigning with a reinvigorated Bird Club Facebook page seemed likely to offer part of the explanation. It was agreed to change the wording on the website membership pages to make it clearer that subscriptions for new members joining between October and the end of December would continue through the whole of the ensuing year before falling due for renewal.

Action: Martin

Secretary: David reported that Nic Wilson, a member who contributed Nature Notes to *The Guardian*, had offered to create and take initial responsibility for an HNHS site on BlueSky. The platform was growing increasingly popular with groups that included the RSPB in reaction to the increasing politicisation of 'X', formerly Twitter. The Society's 'X' site had fallen out of use. It was agreed to accept Nic's kind offer and to hold a fuller discussion on use of social media at the next meeting.

Action: David

7. Recording and monitoring

- MARA – it was noted that the ten-year survey had entered its final month.
- Herts Invertebrate Project – Ian said the group was planning a full series of field meetings during the 2025 season. Work was currently taking place to digitise the beetles recording cards created by the late Trevor James.
- Recorder's Committee – Ronni said the committee had been reviewing the code of practice for recorders, updating it for language and changing methodologies. These included the increasing submission of photographs for verification, rather than voucher specimens.

8. Meetings and events

- Autumn Meeting and 2024 AGM (Saturday 16 November 2024) The meeting had been a success, with attendance above 70, back at pre-Covid levels. The committee was, again, grateful to all who helped run the event and to Alister Leggatt and Affinity Water for hosting it.
- Gerald Salisbury Memorial Lecture 2025 (Wednesday 22 January). Adrian Dutton would be lecturing on his survey of saproxylic beetles in Panshanger Park, which had shown the site was of national importance. Stuart had kindly offered to provide Adrian with overnight accommodation, with David as a backup option.
- Herts Bird Conference 2025 (Saturday 8 March). The programme, to take place at Affinity's Hatfield offices, had been announced at the previous meeting.
- HNHS 150th anniversary exhibition private view (Friday 20 March) See item 3 above.

9. Publications

The committee acknowledged its debt of gratitude to Jack Fearnside whose health meant he could not continue taking a lead in designing and managing production of the *Transactions*. Helen Baker, his former colleague at LTD Design, had offered to undertake the work next year, but would require payment. David said Helen was familiar with the Society's publications and had designed and overseen the 2017 *Butterflies* atlas herself. She would continue to draw on Jack's knowledge and expertise, so it was potentially an ideal solution.

Helen had obtained quotes for re-printing *Hertfordshire Geology and Landscape* and *Beetles of Hertfordshire*, both of which has sold out since the last meeting. Paper prices had increased considerably since the last re-prints, which meant the books would have to be offered at a higher price. It was provisionally agreed to obtain 100 more copies of *Geology* for £2,683 but discover whether Herts Geological Society wished to share the costs and copies before placing the order. To accommodate the 1/3 discount claimed by booksellers, the RRP would need to increase from £39.50 to around £45. It was also agreed to order 50 copies of *Beetles* for £2,163. This indicated an RRP of at least £65 instead of £61.

Action: David

10. AOB

Astrid reported that the extensive herbarium created by botanist Ann Boucher had been donated to the Natural History Museum in London. Chris said that Ann had given Trevor a great deal of help when he was compiling *Flora of Hertfordshire*.

Next meeting: 7.30pm Monday 3 February. NB: online only.

David Utting, HNHS Secretary.
15 December 2024