

# HERTFORDSHIRE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

HNHS/86M

## 86<sup>th</sup> Management Committee Meeting

Monday 17 November 2025 at 250 Sandridge Road, St Albans and online via Zoom conferencing

Present: Agneta Burton, Ian Carle, Rupert Evershed, Hanna Grimsdale, Tim Hill, Toby Hill, Chris James, Martin Ketcher, Harry Tallantire, Peter Tallantire (Chair), David Utting (Secretary) and Alex Waechter

### 1. Chair's welcome and apologies

Peter welcomed committee members who were meeting for the first time since AGM elections on 18 October. Apologies were received from Ronni Edmonds-Brown and Stuart Warrington. Toby Hill had kindly offered to take over running the HNHS website. It was agreed he be co-opted as a committee member.

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

Minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2025 were approved. Matters arising:

- 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations: David said good progress was being made assembling exhibits – mainly photographs – for the exhibition at North Hertfordshire Museum in Hitchin between 16 December and 15 February. Graham White ('Have I Got Poos for You!') and Mike Ilett ('Birds of North Hertfordshire') had kindly agreed to give talks in the New Year. The exhibition would be small compared with St Albans earlier in the year.
- HNHS Awards: It was agreed that the formal process adopted this year, asking for written nominations to be matched against criteria for the two awards, should be repeated. Tim offered to draft standard nomination forms.

*Action: Tim*

### 3. Website management and upgrade

Peter introduced a discussion on upgrading the website. He said it was overdue and could usefully be taken forward following the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. He anticipated a substantial piece of work, possibly taking two years to complete. The cost might be considerable – as much as £10,000 – but the Society could afford the work. In addition to upgrading software, it would be important to obtain perspectives from interested parties on what the website should provide, and on which items on the existing site could be archived. He suggested the next step should be a detailed committee discussion on what was needed, followed by preparation of an outline, high-level specification for the work. Toby's offer to co-ordinate work on the upgrade was welcomed, alongside his willingness to take over management of the existing site from David. David would introduce Toby to the site management tools and complete the necessary handover. He noted that Chris Dee (Garganey Consulting) who designed and provided technical support for the existing site, did not wish to be involved in the upgrade. The Drupal software version currently used was out of date and no longer compatible with Google analytics. It had become impossible to know in recent years how many visitors the site had, and which pages were most popular. He underlined the importance of ensuring an upgrade was fully compatible with Indicia, the National Forum for Biological Recording's open-source software for 'warehousing' wildlife records nationally. Options for replacing printed county atlases with online 'living' atlases that could be updated in real time might usefully be considered as part of the upgrade.

*Action: Toby, David*

Rupert wondered if the opportunity might be taken to create an entirely separate website for the Bird Club as members sometime found the division of information between two sites confusing. Peter said economies of scale might offer continuing reasons to link the two sites, but this could be investigated. Ian asked about the future of the *Transactions* archive as the software he purchased to convert scanned pages into indexed, searchable text, would only run on the superseded Windows 10 operating system. He wondered whether the advance of AI (artificial intelligence) might soon remove the need for conventional indexation. David hoped it would still be possible to update the archive to include recent issues of the *Transactions*. It was agreed the Society would pay for replacement software compatible with Windows 11 if Ian wanted to buy it.

*Action: Ian, David*

It was also agreed that time should be set aside for a more detailed plenary discussion at the next meeting. A sub-group could then be created to lead the upgrade project. David would let Ronni know about the proposed upgrade so it could be mentioned at the next Recorders' Committee meeting. Alex noted that a planned upgrade of the HERC website might create opportunities for shared learning.

*Action: David*

#### **4) Young adult naturalists mentoring project**

Hanna reported positive feedback from two members who had offered mentoring help following her announcement about the planned project at the Autumn Meeting. She hoped other offers would be forthcoming following publicity in the newsletter circulated with this year's *Transactions*. She was continuing to develop the proposal and hoped it could be publicised through an e-newsletter once the task of recruiting volunteer mentors began in earnest. It was agreed that no personal contact information for mentors should be posted in public.

*Action: Hanna, David*

#### **5) Natural history content at MC meetings**

Chris, building on her suggestion at the previous meeting, proposed that around 15 minutes of each MC meeting should be set aside to hear from a County Recorder or other specialist expert about their particular taxon. Guests could be invited to speak at the beginning of each meeting. The existing 'Recording and monitoring' agenda item would be re-organised to allow for this. There was no obvious need for the items currently included to be discussed at every meeting.

*Action: David*

#### **6) Update on Hertfordshire's Nature Recovery Strategy**

Tim said much useful feedback had been received during the recent consultation, especially on mapping. Publication of the strategy was imminent. The question of whether government funding would become available for strategies to be implemented had still not been answered.

#### **7) Reports**

Treasurer: Peter, as outgoing Acting Treasurer, said the Society remained solvent with around £20,000 in its Lloyds Bank current account and the residual account with Santander. A signature from Ian was still needed on the bank mandate to activate revised signatories for the Lloyds account and proceed with closing the Santander account.

*Action: Ian, Peter*

Secretary: David reported on correspondence from the Campaign to Protect Rural England's Hertfordshire branch seeking help with its 'Hedgerow Heroes' campaign. In addition to seeking volunteers to plant and additional 2km of hedges, they wanted help with survey work to monitor the impact. After consultation with Peter, Ronni and other MC members David had raised the possibility of help in training hedge surveyors. However, he had explained that HNHS recorders would be too busy to take on regular monitoring themselves. Agneta drew attention to recent baseline monitoring of hedges in the Mimram Valley and at St Paul's Walden using PTES (People's Trust for Endangered Species) materials.

The Society had also been sent consultation documents by environmental contractors Maydencroft on draft management plans for Sherrardspark Woods and Northaw Great Wood. Chris, in consultation with Stuart, had provided detailed comments and advice. These had led to changes in the Sherrardspark plan. Reaction to the comments on Northaw were awaited. Chris and Stuart were thanked.

Membership Secretary: Martin said six new members had been recruited since the last meeting and a number of late renewals collected. Membership had reached 535, based on 454 subscriptions. He had written to all 50 members whose memberships had not been renewed at the time of the last meeting, mailing letters to those without working email addresses. The committee thanked him for doing this.

Online payments from two new members, in Spain and Australia, had raised a question of how the Society should respond to international membership applications. A policy was needed on providing overseas

members with the *Transactions*. It was agreed that the two who had already joined could be mailed the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of the *Hertfordshire Naturalist* as a goodwill gesture. However, the forthcoming *Bird Report 2024* and future *Transactions* should be emailed as pdfs unless an overseas member requested a hard copy and paid the additional postage. The website would be updated to reflect this.

*Action: Martin, David*

## **8) Recording and monitoring**

Herts Invertebrate Project: Ian said the project had completed a successful season of fieldwork meetings. It had to set up its own 'Activity' within iRecord, so that records could be attributed to the group. He had entered into correspondence with the iRecord administrators over a quirk where 'no' was set as the default reply to a question asking HIP members if they wanted their record to be included in the 'Activity'. David said the Heartwood Monitoring Group had encountered the same issue with their newly created iRecord 'Activity'.

Herts Environment Records Centre: Alex said HERC had devoted recent time to data delivery and systems development. It had also supplied data to Hertfordshire's High Sheriff, Nicholas Buxton – guest speaker at the HNHS Autumn Meeting – to assist with his 'Nurture through Nature' initiative.

She raised a difficulty with wildlife records submitted via iNaturalist which arrive, by default, with a non-commercial licence (CC-BY-NC) attached to them. This means that HERC cannot make them available for data searches, including those used to inform planning decisions. If iNaturalist users could be persuaded to change their settings to a different licence (Creative Commons CC0, preferably), then it would apply retrospectively to all their records. Alex suggested that if anyone came across prolific iNaturalist recorders, it would be worth contacting them through the platform (or by letting her know about them) to explain the need to change. In discussion it was also noted that iNaturalist 'crowdsourced' identification decisions, rather than seeking expert verification. It's user-friendly interface nevertheless made it popular with non-specialist observers.

## **9) Meetings and events**

150<sup>th</sup> anniversary Autumn Meeting and AGM (18 October). The conference had gone well, attracting an audience of around 70. Nicholas Buxton, the High Sheriff of Hertfordshire, had presented the annual awards and made a surprise presentation to Tim, awarding him a High Sheriff's certificate for valued service to the community. The committee congratulated Tim and thanked him for organising the conference.

Gerald Salisbury Memorial Lecture (Thursday 22 January 2026). Tim had recently discovered that Welwyn Natural History Society booked Welwyn Civic Centre for the wrong date. Fortunately, he had been able to secure the smaller hall for the correct date, so Ian Denholm's lecture on 'The Wild Orchids of Hertfordshire' would go ahead as planned. He was also negotiating with the group that booked the larger hall to see if a swap was possible.

2026 Herts Bird Conference. Tim said Affinity Water had kindly agreed to host the event on Saturday 7 March. He hoped Simon Gillings of the BTO would speak about their 'Acoustic Pipeline' initiative to automate processing of audible and hypersonic audio data.

## **10. Publications**

Stuart was congratulated, in his absence, on the excellent 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of the *Hertfordshire Naturalist* that had recently been published. The *2024 Hertfordshire Bird Report* had also just been published and was awaiting distribution. The committee recorded its congratulations to Clifford Smout, the editor, and thanked everyone who had contributed to this year's *Transactions* or helped with packing and distribution.

## **10. AOB – none**

**Date of next meeting: Monday 23 February 2026**