

HERTFORDSHIRE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

HNHS/87M

87th Management Committee Meeting

Monday 23 February 2026 at 250 Sandridge Road, St Albans and online via Zoom conferencing

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

Apologies: Ronni Edmonds-Brown, Hanna Grimsdale,

1. Chair's welcome

2. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2025 were approved, subject to one correction identified by Agneta. Matters arising:

- 150th anniversary celebrations: David said the commemorative exhibition at North Hertfordshire Museum had opened on 18 December 2025 and been extended at the museum's request by two weeks to run until Sunday 1 March. More than 50 members and friends had attended a lunchtime private view on 12 January, including the High Sheriff, Nicholas Buxton and Chair of North Herts District Council, Cllr Keith Hoskins. David had made a short presentation about the Society's 150-year past and the future of wildlife recording. Renewed thanks were expressed to the anonymous North Hertfordshire HNHS member who has sponsored the event. Capacity audiences of 30 attended successful talks by Graham White ('Have I Got Poos for You!') and Mike Ilett ('Birds of North Hertfordshire') at the museum on 17 January and 3 February, respectively.
- Hertfordshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy: Tim said the strategy had been published in November, followed by an oversubscribed launch event at Hatfield House in January, attended by 120 people. A body had been established to advise on taking the strategy forward. DEFRA implementation funding was being used to create a support post being job-shared by secondees from Gascoyne Cecil Estates and the Environment Agency. Hertfordshire County Council, Gascoyne Cecil Estates and HMWT would provide a collaborative lead on policy. The immediate task was to secure implementation funding before prioritising its distribution to projects.

3. Website management and upgrade

Peter was thanked for preparing a paper (distributed before the meeting) on choices for upgrading the website. This identified four main options:

- A site where the HNHS / Bird Club continued to host its own biological recording system linked to the National Biodiversity Network's Indicia data warehousing system. This would facilitate data control, automated exports to the NBN and Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre (HERC) and the creation of online 'living atlases'. However, it was likely to be the most costly option, requiring use of the compatible Drupal content management system (CMS) to construct the website itself. The maintenance and technical expertise demands were likely to be higher than for other platforms.
- Ending direct data collection on the HNHS / Bird Club sites and encouraging wildlife observers to submit their records via NBN's national iRecord website or the BTO's BirdTrack site. Although low-cost, allowing a choice of CMS software, it would remove local control over data collection and make it hard for site visitors, especially Herts birders, to view up-to-date sighting records.
- A 'hybrid' system with HNHS running a simple record submission form on the website and periodically uploading batches of the resulting data to iRecord. This would preserve local autonomy and allow flexibility over the choice of CMS, although it was not clear whether it could be adopted using BirdTrack as well as iRecord.

- A two site approach where the HNHS would link its recording capacity to Indicia and the Bird Club site would be linked to BirdTrack. This would be potentially less costly than linking both sites to Indicia but would have obvious downsides in terms of maintaining two, separate sites.

Peter emphasised that the paper was a vehicle for discussion and that he was not advocating any of the options as currently described. An upgrade would need to ensure that HERC continued to receive verified HNHS and Bird Club data. It would also need to maintain public access to the expanding online archive of the Society's published *Transactions*.

In discussion: Alex said BTO BirdTrack was not currently integrated with HERC and other local environmental record centres, making its use on a new HNHS website problematic. HERC currently relied on the Bird Club rather than the BTO to obtain local BirdTrack data. It was good example of the difficulties that might arise if the Society stopped collecting records and generating data over which it had control. She recommended that the committee take a step back to consider what the Society would be like if it did not generate its own data. In her view, data collection was a key part of the way HNHS delivered its mandate and remained visible and relevant to the Hertfordshire recording community. Rupert agreed that replacing local collection and verification efforts with BirdTrack would remove valued existing capacity to check and analyse local data and make the county bird recorders redundant.

David expressed concern that future dependence on national recording apps would remove the capacity to publish details of interesting bird sightings on the day, which was a unique selling point for the Bird Club, and the main generator of website traffic. He noted, however, that HNHS's website data collection for other taxa was limited and largely linked to particular atlas surveys. Where county recorders were also verifiers for iRecord, they appeared happy to receive records by that route – not least because it allowed photographs to be attached to a submission, which the current HNHS recording sites did not. Stuart, speaking as county recorder for water beetles, said it was more difficult to add a local perspective to assessments of iRecord submissions when they were being verified as part of a national scheme. Once an unlikely record was shown in Herts on a nationally-generated map, it was difficult to get it removed.

Ian noted that, as an added complication, the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) had its own national database for plants. Generally speaking if HNHS / Bird Club did not have its own method for collecting and verifying data, it would lose control. However, where Hertfordshire did not have its own recorder for a particular taxon, iRecord and national verification provided a sensible alternative route for records. Agneta added that iRecord submissions were increasingly the recommended recording route for smaller groups, such as bryophytes. Toby said one of the positives with iRecord was that it could be used as a convenient phone app as well as a website.

Tim underlined the social importance of the website. It was important that it worked for its audience – by attracting them to view daily records of bird sightings, for example – and encouraged them to get outside to experience nature themselves. The HNHS website should make it as easy as possible to submit a record and make wildlife recording accessible to as many people as possible.

Peter, summing up, said it was clear that the committee did not favour using BirdTrack or iRecord as the sole, future means for submitting and verifying Herts. records. However, it would also take some convincing that Drupal / Indicia was the only available route to acquire and verify records via the website. Further work was needed to discover whether a viable alternative content management system could be adopted that would be more flexible, maintain local control over records and less expensive to construct and maintain.

It was agreed that further consideration of a website upgrade be delegated to a working group, to be convened by Toby. Other members would include: Alex, Ian, Ronni, Rupert, Stuart and, as advisor on photographic content, Steve Chilton (see below).

Action: Toby

It was agreed that Ronni should initiate discussions on an upgrade with the Recorders' Committee and Rupert with the Bird Club Committee. Alla Mashanova and Ian Denholm should be asked to do the same with the Flora Group. David would liaise with Chris Dee, responsible for maintaining the existing website, to ensure his expertise was available to the sub-group.

Action: Ronni, Rupert, David

4) HNHS Photo Galleries

David reported that Steve Chilton, a keen amateur photographer and past MC member, had agreed to take over from him as curator of the photo galleries. He had also offered to contribute a photographer's perspective to updating the website. The committee welcomed both offers of help.

5) Reports

Treasurer: Harry said the financial situation remained positive with around £25,000 in its easy access accounts, another £25,000 on mid-term deposit and £50,000 in longer-term investments. December and January had brought the usual flow of New Year subscriptions. With the 150th anniversary celebrations were over he did not expect exceptional payments in 2026-27. The website upgrade was likely to take place sometime after that. It was noted that 2027 might also see publication of the Hertfordshire Mammals, Reptiles and Amphibians atlas. David agreed to contact the team to check on progress and start a conversation on costs and the potential for sponsorship.

Action: David

Secretary: David thanked Chris for responding to a third consultation on a draft woodland management plan – this time for Mardley Heath –circulated by Maydencroft, acting as consultants to Welwyn Hatfield Council. Her expert advice had been well-received.

He had been contacted by the fundraising department at Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT) about an unsuccessful attempt to obtain a £100 payment for corporate membership by Direct Debit. He had not been aware the Society paid an HMWT subscription. The direct debit related to the old Santander account, so he assumed it was an historic arrangement related to the HNHS role in establishing the Trust. He did not generally favour donating the Society's charitable funds to other charities. Connections between MC members and the Trust as current or former board members, employees and individual members created a further reason why corporate HMWT membership might be viewed as inappropriate. It was agreed that the membership should not be renewed. It was also agreed that, although the issues were not the same, HNHS membership of the Mammal Society should be reviewed at a future meeting

Action: David

Membership Secretary: Martin said that membership for 2026 had so far reached 485 (based on 407 renewed or new subscriptions). Since the November meeting, 20 new members had joined. The MemberMOJO database showed 59 'expired' memberships had yet to be renewed for the new year. David noted that by the end of December 2025, membership peaked at 560, representing a welcome increase of over 10 per cent for the year.

6) Recording and monitoring

Wildlife recording presentation: At November's meeting it was agreed to increase the wildlife content at MC meetings by inviting presentations from County Recorders and recording groups. Ian was thanked for agreeing to give the first of these short talks, on the work of the Hertfordshire Invertebrate Project. This had been founded in 2015 by Joe Gray and William Bishop and was successfully engaged in raising interest in invertebrate recording and the number of Herts. records. To date field meetings at 56 different sites had produced 5,650 records, of which 319 were of conservation significance. They included a pleasing number of species 'new to Hertfordshire', most notably Down Shieldbug at the only known site in the south of England. Although focused on sweep-netting and vegetation 'beating' to finding invertebrates, the group has recorded interesting sightings for other taxa, including fungi and mammals.

Herts Environment Records Centre: Alex said 3,994,000 records had been entered into the database to date and was currently adding a backlog of Bird Club records from 2020. The centre was receiving an increased number of data requests from 'forestry consultants'. This had raised questions over how far HERC could or should vet the professional qualifications of applicants before supplying full, detailed data for a site. Guidelines would be needed, so she would welcome views from committee members and County Recorders.

9) Meetings and events

Gerald Salisbury Memorial Lecture (Thursday 22 January 2026). Tim said Ian Denholm's lecture, written with Richard Bateman, on 'The Wild Orchids of Hertfordshire' had been excellent and was well-attended.

2026 Herts Bird Conference (Saturday 7 March 2026). Graham Knight would give a keynote presentation on Swifts of Hertfordshire and Jess Stokes from the BTO would talk about a new survey of birds in urban greenspaces. Alex had agreed to speak about the 'journey' taken by a record after it was submitted via the Herts Bird Club site.

10. Publications

David noted that sales of *Beetles of Hertfordshire* had dropped-off since mid-2025, regrettably coinciding with the most recent re-print. Stuart offered to submit an advertisement to *The Coleopterist*, including price details. More positively, the North Hertfordshire Museum had sold more than 20 copies of *Birds of Hertfordshire* during the 150th anniversary exhibition, albeit at a bargain price.

Speaking as editor of the *Herts Naturalist*, Stuart said he had three papers left over from last year ready for publication in the 2026 edition. He would welcome help in persuading others to submit articles and wildlife notes. David agreed to include a call for papers with a reminder message he would be sending members for the Bird Conference. Stuart agreed that the advisory notes of contributors –available as a download from the website – would benefit from updating and made more user-friendly

Action: David, Stuart

10. AOB – none

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 12 May 2026