HERTFORDSHIRE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

HNHS/88M

88th Management Committee Meeting

Tuesday 12 May 2026 at 250 Sandridge Road, St Albans and online via Zoom conferencing

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

Apologies: Agneta Burton, Ian Carle, Ronni Edmonds-Brown, Hanna Grimsdale, Chris James,

1. **Chair's welcome** – It was agreed to take agenda item 3 (Website Upgrade) before matters arising from the previous minutes as Toby needed to leave the meeting early.

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

   Minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2026 were approved, Matters arising:

   - Hertfordshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy: Tim said Peter Marshall from Gascoyne Cecil Estates and Becky Ingram from the Environment Agency were sharing the lead on DEFRA-funded work to specify a delivery strategy. They were investigating the use of a fund-raising consultancy hoping it would bring in 'game-changing' sums to secure sustainable, long-term changes. Tim's idea that the county's strategy should be piloted in a discreet area, such as the Mimram catchment area, appeared to be gaining traction. He had lobbied for HNHS to be included on the project oversight board, but this had been refused. The possibility of an HNHS place on one of the working groups monitoring implementation had been suggested.

3. **Website upgrade progress report**

Toby said conversations with David and Chris Dee had confirmed there was no need for the Society to tie itself to Drupal for the planned upgrade. The current recording sites for the mammals, reptiles and amphibians atlas (MARA) and dragonflies were linked to the Indicia data 'warehouse' that only worked with Drupal. However, data collection for MARA was now complete and Roy Woodward was happy accepting dragonfly records for the current survey via iRecord. He would, nevertheless, contact Roy to confirm that the Indicia link was dispensable.

During a short presentation, Toby noted that the current website had become outdated and was not smartphone-friendly. Some content needed updating and there was potential to make site administration less cumbersome by using a different content management system. He showed the committee mock-up pages made with Wagtail, the content management system used by HMWT. Although requiring a little more work to set up than Wordpress, Wagtail was robust, very secure, and easier to maintain. It would display photographs well. Toby had spoken to John van Breda, of the National Forum for Biological Recording, who thought it possible to design an interface with iRecord that would facilitate records submission and 'pulling' relevant Hertfordshire records to the site. A new site would be fully integrated with the Herts Bird Club site while allowing the Club to maintain its own, bespoke system for collecting records. Of the 68 responses received from members to a questionnaire about the website, 65 had come from users of the Bird Club site who were positive about its main existing features, including the daily-updated bird sightings on the front page.

In discussion, Alex asked if it would be possible for HNHS to maintain its own records submissions page and then 'push' records to iRecord. Toby thought that might be possible but mentioned the added complexity it would create. Peter suggested doing this might be considered when another county-wide survey was being planned.

The committee agreed to Toby's recommendation that next steps should be to convene the previously agreed website steering group and give thought to identifying a website developer who could advise on the specification process for a new site and costs. He was thanked for his continuing work.

Action: Toby

4. Mammal Society membership

David reported that the Mammal Society proposed to raise the HNHS annual subscription from £43 to £150 from January 2027. Investigation revealed that the Mammal Society had created a new category of 'Affiliate Membership' for groups and placed HNHS in it, although there appeared to be no relevant information on their website. It was agreed that Mammal Society membership brought no obvious direct benefit to HNHS members, and the membership should be terminated. David was asked to consult Jenny Jones, the county mammal recorder, and proceed with cancellation unless she raised further issues.

Action: David

5. Mammal Society membership

Stuart said the new issue was starting to come together, although he needed more report offers from county recorders. He asked for an extended report provided by the Herts Invertebrate Group to be treated as a recorders' report this year, rather than printing it in the Society's annual report. Articles so far accepted included papers on the use being made by Water Voles of rafts, soil health at Heartwood and the translocation and reinforcement of Wild Liquorice populations. He had commissioned a photo feature on Ladybirds and there would be an obituary of the late fungi recorder, Alan Outen. Stuart also proposed to include reviews of the recently published book *Hertfordshire Puddingstone* co-authored by county geology recorder Mike Howgate, and *Flies of Britain and Ireland*, a photo field guide whose authors included Gail Ashton and Rory Dimond from Herts Invertebrate Group. In discussion it was suggested that Nicola Thompson, the HMWT's Rivers Officer, be asked to write an article about the environmental DNA (eDNA) project she is contributing to, which is led by the Natural History Museum.

Action: Stuart

6. Annual HNHS Awards

It was agreed that new nominations be sought from the membership. These would be in addition to five nominations received last year where no award had yet been made. It was noted that all these were men and that nominations for outstanding women naturalists and/ or contributors to natural history in Hertfordshire would be welcome. Tim agreed to review the awards criteria before David circulated a call for nominations.

Action: Tim and David

7. Reports

Treasurer: Harry said the Society's finances continued to be in good shape. He had begun preparing the 2025-6 accounts. His expectation, comparing current bank balances with a year ago, was that there would be a surplus for the year of a few thousand pounds.

Membership Secretary: Martin reported that 17 new members had joined since the last meeting, which was more than normal. There were currently 510 members relating to 428 subscriptions. Some standing orders had yet to renew this year, so a further increase in membership numbers could be expected.

Secretary: David expressed thanks to Steve Chilton, who took over responsibility earlier in the year for non-bird HNHS photo galleries on the website. He had made an immediate impact uploading 249 new photographs, with many more expected as the season brought in butterfly, dragonfly and wildflower records. David noted that it was 10 years since he took over as HNHS Secretary from Linda Smith. Although he was happy to carry on for the time being, he hoped a suitable replacement might be found by spring 2028, by which time he would be 75. He asked MC members for help in identifying a potential successor.

Action: David and all

8. Recording and monitoring

Herts Invertebrate Project: Ian had sent a message reporting on the first two meetings of the year. Highlights included an uncommon cranefly *Ctenophora flaveolata*, the nationally rare fungus weevil *Anthribus fasciatus* and *Ischnomera sanguinicollis* a nationally scarce false blister beetle found at Hudnall Park. The

group had also discovered *Platystomos albinus* a nationally-scarce fungus weevil and *Muirodelphax aubei,* a plant hopper usually found on the coast; this was a second county record and the first since 1951.

Environment Records Centre: Alex said the number of database records had now passed 4 million. Work had continued on a new ancient woodland inventory and on supporting the new Local Nature Recovery Strategy preparing a report on Great Crested Newt records. She had consulted the Recorders' Committee about her concerns over the level of database access that HERC should give to 'forestry consultants' who might not be qualified ecologists. In discussion it was suggested that while HERC might usefully supply consultants with a list of local professional ecologists who were members of the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management, it was not part of HERC's own role to provide advice on interpreting data.

9. Meetings and events

Autumn Meeting and AGM (Saturday 7 November 2026). Tim said the date had been agreed with Affinity Water and Martin would give a keynote presentation about Purwell Nine Springs reserve where had been the voluntary warden for more than 40 years.
Herts Bird Conference (Saturday 6 March 2027). The date had been agreed with Affinity Water and Tim hoped to arrange a presentation from Simon Gillings , Head of Data Science at the BTO, about the 'acoustic monitoring pipeline' providing tools for bird and bat identification.

10. Publications
Stuart had secured a free advertising offer from *The Coleopterist* to market *Beetles of Hertfordshire* at a discount. David would suggest an attractive price for the offer.

Action: David, Stuart

David reported improved sales of *Birds of Hertfordshire* from a substantial price reduction to £10 (plus p&p) offered online, at the 2026 Bird conference and at the North Hertfordshire Museum's bookshop.

10. AOB – Agneta, via email, had queried why a report from the Hertfordshire Invertebrate Project was always included on the agenda for MC meetings, but feedback from other species groups within HNHS were not. It was agreed that it would make sense in future for all of the groups – Birds, Bryophytes, Dragonflies and Damselflies, Flora and Invertebrates – to be invited to give one presentation on their activities just once a year.

Action: David

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 14 July 2026