

Hertfordshire Natural History Society Management Committee Report for the year April 2017-March 2018

Aims and purposes

The Hertfordshire Natural History Society promotes the study and recording of the flora and fauna of Hertfordshire and encourages a wider interest in natural history, including the conservation of wildlife, habitats and geological features, for the purpose of environmental protection or improvement.

Achievements and performance

Highlights

The Society made important progress with a number of projects during the year, including completion of a major upgrade to the Herts Bird Club's website. Trevor James finalised the text of his landmark book *Birds of Hertfordshire* (published by the Society in July 2018) and scanning work began in preparation for the 'digitisation' of the Society's published Transactions. In July 2017, the Society worked in partnership with the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT) and Tarmac plc. to stage a second, very successful two-day Festival of Wildlife at Panshanger Park. Membership showed a modest increase over the year from 463 to 470.

Wildlife recording

Most wildlife records collected and collated by the Society and its network of county recorders are electronic. This facilitates data sharing and we remain proud that, out of almost 2.5 million records collected by the Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre (HERC) since 2012, two-thirds were submitted through the Society.

The Society's websites, again, provided the main focus for its record-gathering activities throughout the year. Further opportunities for information and image sharing were enabled through Facebook, Twitter and Flickr. Bird records for outnumbers those received for other taxa, and, during the year, the Society completed a major upgrade to the Herts Bird Club website and its online recording system. The latter is based on the Indicia system developed by the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) and specifically designed to facilitate electronic data sharing.

We continue to encourage volunteers and professionals to collect and submit wildlife records

through our websites, or using national schemes such as BTO Birdtrack, the Mammal Society and the Record phone app. Records can also be submitted to the relevant county recorder by email or on paper.

Surveys and projects

Mammals, amphibians and reptiles atlas (Herts MARRA). The countywide survey that underpins this major project began in 2015 and will continue until 2019. More than 7,600 records had been received by the end of 2017, but many more are needed – not least in a number of under-recorded parts of the county. Further information can be found in the article about the project's progress on pp. 44 to 47. Thanks go to the project's organisers, Chantal Helms, Ian Fleck, Jenny Jones and Dave Willis, for its continued progress.

Herts Invertebrate Project. The project was set up in 2015 to improve the monitoring of invertebrates and encourage newcomers to recording to develop their confidence and skills. During the year, five surveys were conducted: at Balls Wood and Hertford Heath, Oughtonhead Common, Roughdown Common, Panshanger, and Whippendell Wood. As in previous years, the field meetings generated an array of useful invertebrate records. The group also met over the winter when it was decided to run 2018 surveys at a number of Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust reserves where management plans were due for renewal. This will increase the usefulness of the records. Thanks go to the co-organisers: Ian Carlo, Joe Gray, and William Bishop.

Monitoring of Heathwood Forest. A major celebration was held in March 2018 to mark the planting of the 600,000th and last tree at Heathwood. The complete forest now comprises ancient woodland (18ha), newly planted woodland (250ha) and grassland and wildflower meadows (79ha) as well as small areas of natural regeneration, seed sown forest, and wetland. In addition, there is a community orchard with 600-fruit trees and an iCuba arboretum with all the trees and shrubs native to the British Isles.

Long term wildlife monitoring has continued. The annual breeding bird survey (by Ken and Linda Smith) in 2017 showed a small decline in Skylarks,

possibly caused as young saplings replace rough grass, and continued increases in Robins, corvids, Wrens, Meadow Pipits, Whitethroats and Starlings. Highlights included a few Willow Warblers and a pair of Grasshopper Warblers – a photograph of which won the HNSH competition for best photograph of 2017. The monthly bird survey (Robert Everhead) also continued, revealing high numbers of Yellowhammer, Meadow Pipit, Linnet, Goldfinch, Skylark, and Starling, with winter numbers swelled by Lesser Redpoll, Robin and Fieldfare.

The butterfly survey (Andrew Steele) showed dramatic increases in Small Skipper, Marbled White, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown and Small Heath, as well as good numbers of Large Skipper, Common Blue, Spotted Wood and Ringlet. A highlight was a first record of Purple Empress.

In May and August 2017 the flora monitoring group re-surveyed the 100-100 plots along transects through old woodland and planted areas. As expected the natural regeneration area plots, where the density of trees and shrubs is high, are becoming less diverse as canopy cover increases. Data sets have been archived with summary information available on the HNSH Heartwood site.

The small mammal survey (Chantal Helm and Ian Fleck) in September revealed large numbers of Wood Mice and Bank Voles, smaller numbers of Field Voles and Common Shrews, a single Tuff-weeched Mouse and the first Water Shrew recorded at the site, interestingly nowhere near water. No Harvest Mice or Pygmy Shrews were found. Full spectrum bat detectors were placed in various locations throughout the active season from March to September. The Barbastelle, which is nationally rare, was recorded for the first time. However, activity levels were low compared to species like Common and Soprano Pipistrelle, already known to be present.

A full colour illustrated guide to the arboretum



Ian Fleck and Chantal Helm installing a bat detector (photo David Ciringi).

has been published describing all the trees and shrubs native to the British Isles, with information on identification, natural distribution and past and present uses. It is available, price £3, from Sandridge Village Store, Carpenters Nursery, and Wheatthampstead Manor Pharmacy, or can be ordered by email from letiaxlogg@gmail.com.

Tree Sparrow Recovery Project. The Herts Bird Club continues to support and monitor the last breeding colony in Hertfordshire. This is based around Tytterhanger and Cousens Farms at London Colney where we maintain two, year-round feeding stations. There were the same number of nests in nest-boxes at Cousens in 2017 as in 2016, with 25 nesting attempts. But while 75 eggs were laid, only 24 fledged young. However, there were a small number of nests in natural sites around Tytterhanger Farm. On the 1st of January 2017 there were a minimum of 14 tagged birds, six of which were tagged as nestlings and eight as full grown birds.

The Herts Flora Group. The group held five field meetings in 2017 in localities which spanned the width of the county from Tring to Royston, and encompassed a range of semi-natural and urban habitats. As well as generating records for the HERC database, the sites targeted species and grid squares in need of contemporary data to contribute to a new Atlas of the British and Irish Flora, this being coordinated by the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland. Members of the Flora Group contributed to other biological projects including the monitoring of successional changes in vegetation resulting from habitat restoration work at Heartwood Forest.

Privacy and data protection. In the autumn of 2017 it became apparent that the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) being introduced in May 2018 would carry implications for the use of personal data (including location) provided by individuals submitting environmental records. Detailed investigation and consultations with national organisations clarified that although the legislation's effect on records submission and other activities was not as radical as first appeared, the Society would need to draft and publish a detailed privacy policy, explaining how personal data provided by its members, recorders and customers would be treated. The new policy was published on the website in May 2018. We are grateful to Ian Carle, manager of the Herts Environmental Records Centre and a management committee member, for drafting the policy, and to members of the Herts Bird Club committee who contributed to discussions.

Online archive. Work on creating a searchable online

archive of the Society's Transcriptions made good progress during the year, including the major task of scanning journals dating back 140 years. Volunteers were recruited to assist with proof-reading and correcting the scans using bespoke software designed by Ian Carle. Delay, however, followed when it became clear that the new General Data Protection Regulation (see above) would impact on the use of personal data provided by those submitting historic as well as current environmental records. Work on the 'digitalisation' project was planned to resume as soon as the relevant issues had been clarified.

Publications

Transactions of the Hertfordshire Natural History Society 2017, Volume 49

Part 1: The Hertfordshire Naturalist 2017 was

published in October 2017. We are most grateful to our new Editor, Judy England and David Johnson (Commissioning Editor) who led the editorial team.

Part 2: The Hertfordshire Bird Report 2016 was

published in November 2017. Congratulations go to the new Editor, Clifford Smart, and his team for, again, publishing the report less than 11 months after the end of the recording year.

Despite recurring health problems during the year, Trevor James completed the text of *Beebles of Hertfordshire*, including an account of all 2,483 species reliably recorded in the county to date. His book, with 750 distribution maps for the more widely-recorded species and background chapters on habitats, key sites, ecology and wider conservation issues, is the first to cover a single county's Coleoptera in such detail. It draws on meticulously researched historical records and the discoveries of modern-day observers, not least the author's own extensive fieldwork and studies. We are delighted that the Royal Entomological Society, based at Chiswell Green, has recognised the book's groundbreaking significance by generously agreeing to fund half its production costs. Our thanks also go to Ken and Linda Smith for generous financial support.

We also note with pleasure that a panel of judges chosen by *British Birds* magazine during the year

shortlisted our 2015 publication *Birds of Hertfordshire* among the top six local bird atlases in Britain, before placing it fourth in their final assessment.

Events

The Festival of Wildlife

For a second year, The Festival of Wildlife, organised by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust in association with the HNHs, took place as a two-day, outdoor event at Panshanger Park on 29 and 30 July 2017. Co-hosted by the site's owners Yarnac plc, the festival included guided walks, conservation demonstrations, talks and activities designed specially for children and families. Attendance over the two days tripled from the previous year to around 3,000.

Autumn Conference and AGM

The Society's Autumn Conference took place at the Hatfield offices of Affinity Water on Saturday 4 November 2017 with 75 people attending. The programme included talks by Roger Beeveroff, Head Manager of the Legacy Grazing Project, which supplies Red Poll cattle and Old English goats for a number of Hertfordshire wildlife reserves. Jenny Shreeves from the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust spoke about efforts to restore the ecological health of Thorney Wash nature reserve, including the relocation there of 210 water voles from marshland in Essex. Sarah Scott, from the Environment Agency, presented findings from her research on the importance of river and canal 'corridors' to bats. The HNHs 1875 Awards for 2017 were presented to Andrew Wood and, posthumously, to Ted Fletcher (see below).

The 121st Annual General Meeting took place as part of the autumn conference and was chaired by Agneta Burton. The officers and trustees elected at the AGM are listed below. We are, once again, grateful to



PNHS chair Agneta Burton with speakers at the Autumn Conference: Jenny Shreeves, Ian Carle, Charal Hells, Sarah Scott and Roger Beeveroff (photo Tim Hill).

Allister Leggatt and Affinity Water for hosting both the Society's conferences during the year and to Tim Hill, our events and talks organiser.

Gerald Salisbury Memorial Lecture

The annual lecture jointly organised by HNTS and the Welwyn Natural History was given by Michael Clark on 'Trevin Orchard and a Life of Badgers'. Around 80 members and guests attended Welwyn Civic Centre on 22 November to hear him talk about his twin enthusiasms – pursued over half a century – for the study and conservation of Badgers and the preservation of traditional varieties of apple.

Herts Bird Club/British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Conference

The annual conference at the Affinity Water offices on Saturday 30 March 2018 attracted 107 members and friends. The programme included a disturbing presentation by RSPB Senior Investigations Officer Gay Shorrocks on illegal bird persecution in the UK, such as the use of baited carcasses and traps to kill Buzzards and Red Kites. Tony Blake spoke on 'The Birds of Hillfield Reserve', including its breeding population of Black-necked Grebes. Neil Collard of the BTO described the aims, methods and successes of the Wetland Bird Survey (WetBS), while Martin Ketcher and Marny Orchard reviewed the progress of bird surveys in the county (including a new 'Seabird Count' starting in the autumn). Graham Knight summarised the birding highlights of 2017. rarities among the 198 species recorded included Dotted, Kentish Plover, Bee-eater, White-winged Black Tern and Parrot Crossbill.

The HNTS 1875 Awards for 2017

The Society's 1875 Awards recognise an outstanding Hertfordshire naturalist and an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to natural history in Hertfordshire on a voluntary basis. The 2017 award for an outstanding contribution was edged with sadness as it was awarded posthumously to Ted Fletcher, long-time Editor of the *Hertfordshire Bird Report*, who died suddenly in September 2016. In addition to editing the *Bird Report* for almost 20 years, Ted also served as Club Secretary from 1991 and Secretary to the Herts Rare Birds Panel between 1993 and 2003. The award was presented to Ted's partner, Marilyn Coupland at the Autumn Meeting.

The award for an outstanding naturalist was made to Andrew Wood, recognising his work as county butterfly recorder and collator for the Herts and Midhampshire branch of Butterfly Conservation. Andrew's meticulous work over many years culminated in his acclaimed book, *Butterflies of Hertfordshire and Midhampshire*,



Left, HNTS Chair Agneta Burton presenting Andrew Wood with his 1875 Award and right, Bird Club chair Peter Dealing presenting Ted Fletcher's posthumous Award to Marilyn Coupland (photos Tim Hill).

which was published by the Society in 2016. This book is the first comprehensive guide to butterflies in the two counties for almost 50 years.

Financial review

The Society's accounts are prepared on a cash basis in accordance with Charity Commission guidance. They show that the Society remains in a sound financial position with cash funds of £46,840 as of 31 March 2018, an increase of £2,928 on the previous year.

Income in 2017-18 was significantly down at £66,864, mainly reflecting the absence of any large legacies. In the absence of any new publication, there was also a fall in book sales (around £3,500 compared to over £10,000 last year). Since total income fell below £25,000, and there is no legal or constitutional requirement for the accounts to be independently audited, the Management Committee concluded there was no need to do so for this year.

Total expenditure was also down to £33,441 (from over £28,000 the previous year). This was mainly due to a fall in printing costs (down over £15,000) in the absence of any new books.

Income from subscriptions, Gift Aid, and investments continues comfortably to exceed our regular commitments. On that basis, the Management Committee has concluded there is no need to change its membership subscription rates for 2019.

Income and expenditure has been allocated to either our General Fund (used for everyday running costs), or the Project Fund used for one-off initiatives such as new books, website upgrades, or digitising our archive. In accordance with our reserves policy, we aim to keep around 18 months running costs in the General Fund, with the rest of our readily available cash in the Project Fund. We currently have slightly over half the society's assets (£22,837 at 31 March 2018) in longer-term investments – the MHC Charity Fund – to provide a regular source of income alongside members' subscriptions.

Volunteers

The Society is managed and run entirely by volunteers. We wish to thank all our volunteers whose hard work keeps the Society going, in particular the county recorders, the editors of our two journals and those moderating and updating the websites.

Members news

Our warm congratulations go to June Crew, who was awarded the British Empire Medal in the 2018 New Year Honours for 'voluntary service to natural history and the community in Beodbourne, Hertfordshire'. A past winner of the 1875 Award for an outstanding contribution to natural history in the county, June organised Cheshunt Natural History Society for many years and is a talented all-round naturalist and conservationist, with a special interest in plants and fungi. We also congratulate Andrew Steele, who received the Woodland Trust's Acorn Award for his voluntary monitoring of butterflies at Heartwood Forest and ecologist and former Bird Club Chairman Ken Smith on receiving the British Trust for Ornithology's Tucker Medal for outstanding service. With sadness we record the deaths during the year of former HNHS Secretary John Scyver (1928-2017) and Prof John Catt (1939-2017), county geology

recorder and contributing editor of our publication *Hertfordshire Geology and Landscape*. Their obituaries are on pp. 74 and 66.

Structure, Governance and Management

The Society is a registered charity, governed by a formal constitution last amended in 2007. The Trustees of the Society are elected each year at the Annual General Meeting in October or November and form the Management Committee. In November, 11 members of the Society's Management Committee were elected at the AGM, nine of whom also serve as trustees (see table below). During the year the Committee met four times, on 25 April, 11 July, 18 September and 18 January. The membership of the Society increased over the year to over 480 at 31 March 2017.

Virginia Kennard, HNHS Membership Secretary for the past two years, is moving to Lancashire. We are grateful for all her hard work and welcome her successor, Geoff Hill, who was co-opted to the management committee in April 2018.

Administrative information

The Society's registered address is 250 Sandridge Road, St Albans, AL1 4AL.

Members of the Management Committee: elected at the AGM in 2016 and 2017

Role	2016/17	2017/18
Chair	Agneta Barton*	Agneta Barton*
Treasurer	Peter Tallantire*	Peter Tallantire*
Secretary and Registrar	David Utting*	David Utting*
Membership Secretary	Virginia Kennard	Virginia Kennard
Herts Bird Club	Jack Fearnside	Jack Fearnside
Editor, <i>Hertfordshire Naturalist</i>	Judy England	Judy England
Chair of Recorders' Committee	Veronica Edmonds Brown*	Veronica Edmonds Brown*
Recording	Ian Carle*	Ian Carle*
Herts Bird Club	Alan Gardiner*	Alan Gardiner*
Events	Tim Hill*	Tim Hill*
Special projects	Charital Helm*	Charital Helm*
Archivist and Special projects	Trevor James*	Trevor James*
Special projects	Joe Gray	Joe Gray

* MC members who are also HNHS trustees.

HNHS Management Committee

Draft dated August 2018 for presentation at the Society's AGM on 3 November 2018