



# Hertfordshire Natural History Society

## Management Committee Report for the year April 2023 to March 2024

*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.*

### **Summary of achievements and performance**

Planning started for celebrations to mark the Society's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2025. These will include an exhibition between March and June at St Albans Museum and an extended edition of the *Hertfordshire Naturalist*. An anniversary logo has been designed by Jack Fearnside (see above). A lively, preliminary discussion on future strategy for the HNHS and Herts Bird Club, featured at a September 2023 conference to commemorate Trevor James, the county's late recorder for plants and beetles. More than 50 members and friends listened to tributes to Trevor and talks relating to his specialist wildlife interests.

The Autumn Meeting and AGM in October featured presentations on the part that anglers are playing in conservation along the Colne Valley, Water Vole surveying in the Lea Valley and the Wilderhood community-engagement project in St Albans. The Annual Meeting approved a series of constitutional changes. These include clearer rules for managing potential conflicts of interest and formally recognise the use of online meetings and banking arrangements. The annual Gerald Salisbury Lecture in February was given by Sarah Brockless, ecologist at the Spains Hall Estate in Essex, who described the positive effects of introduced European Beaver colonies. The Bird Conference in March included talks on the importance of the Colne Valley wetlands for birdlife and increasingly impressive bird records from Stanborough Gravel Pits.

A powerful new website for the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Moth Group, funded by the Society, went live in January. Information about all reliably recorded species has been combined with photographs and tetrad maps, effectively creating an online atlas that will be routinely updated as records are added ([hertsmiddxmoths.uk](http://hertsmiddxmoths.uk)). Less positively, this is the first annual report for many years that has not included an update on efforts to preserve Hertfordshire's last Tree Sparrows at Tyttenhanger. There were no breeding records in 2022 or 2023 and the colony is now, sadly, considered extinct. A paper by Ken Smith, Peter Delaloye, Richard Geary, Alan Gardiner and Rupert Evershed on the loss and contributing reasons was published in the *Hertfordshire Bird Report 2022*.

### **Wildlife recording**

Most wildlife records collected and collated by the Society and its network of county recorders are submitted electronically. This facilitates data sharing. More than three million records have been collected by the Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre (HERC) since 2013, most of which have been submitted through the Society.

We encourage volunteers and professionals to collect and submit wildlife records through our own websites, or using national schemes, principally iRecord, BTO Birdtrack and the Mammal Society. The HNHS currently maintains website recording portals for birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles, and dragonflies. Further opportunities for information and image sharing are enabled through Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and Flickr. Records can also be submitted to the relevant county recorder by email or on paper.

### **Surveys and projects**

*Dragonfly and damselfly atlas survey* Survey work for a new Hertfordshire Dragonfly Atlas continued during 2023 with over 7,000 records now received. In the first two years of the survey 31 species have

been recorded, with 29 potentially breeding. The first full survey of county between 2000 to 2005 found only 22 species, of which 19 were confirmed or probably breeding. The most significant news during 2023 was that Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly, *Ischnura pumilio*, was confirmed as a breeding species, with emergence noted at King's Meads. A number of other recently arrived species showed signs of consolidating their presence in the county and spreading to new areas, including Norfolk Hawker, *Aeshna isoceles*, Lesser Emperor, *Anax parthenope*, and Beautiful Demoiselle, *Calopteryx virgo*. Other good records included the county's fourth confirmed record of Variable Damselfly, *Coenagrion pulchellum*, at Admiral's Walk Lake, Broxbourne, and the fourth and fifth records of Keeled Skimmer, *Orthetrum coerulescens*, at Balls Wood and Kingsmeads.

*Mammals, amphibians and reptiles atlas (Herts MARA)* The tenth and final year of data collection is focussing on tetrads where few mammal, amphibian and reptile records have so far been submitted. A number of 'mini bioblitz' events have taken place in the past year, including small mammal trapping in the autumn months when populations are high. Especially welcome records have included Harvest Mouse at Sandon in the north of the county. Harvest Mice are pretty rare in Hertfordshire so we ask everyone aware of a site to check for it on the MARA website. If the site has not yet been recorded, please get in touch. This is also the case for Hazel Dormouse and House Mouse, for which there are almost no recent county records. This year's monthly 'gap-filling' events involve a walk round the tetrad in the afternoon, followed by a driving transect from sunset to record bats and other nocturnal species. Torches are also being shone into any accessible waterbody to see if amphibians are present. In the past year we have visited most of the tetrads that did not have Grey Squirrel or Mole (usually molehill) records. If you can see a remaining tetrad on the website where these two common species remain unrecorded, please consider visiting them for a walk to see if you can spot them. The MARA team thanks everyone who has submitted records for their continuing support.

*Herts Invertebrate Project* Eight meetings took place in 2023 – starting with field trips to HMWT's newest nature reserves Astonbury Wood and Archers Green. Despite the early season weather being against us, David Carr and Rory Dimond found some notable spiders at Archers Green (for further details see the recorder's report) and *Asiraca clavicornis* put in an appearance at Astonbury. This species of planthopper appears to be undergoing significant range expansion. A visit to Clothall Common was a highlight where two species were added to the county list - Finn Harrigan found the Sandrunner (*Sciocoris (Sciocoris) cursitans*) and Ian Carle located *Tychius schneideri*, a weevil associated Kidney Vetch. Ian also found *Megalonotus antennatus*, a ground bug, at only its second county site. A visit to Hertford Heath in June produced the second modern county record for *Ulopa reticulata*, a tiny flightless bug associated with Heather. Subsequent visits by Ian Carle and David Carr to Bricket Wood Common and Nomansland Common produced further records of this species. Perhaps its small size, habit of remaining motionless and its resemblance to a heather flower have allowed it to remain undiscovered until recently. July's trip to Thorley Wash HMWT Nature Reserve coincided with very warm weather but a couple of species were added to the site list. A visit to King's Meads in August produced some notable records, including *Dictyna pusilla*, a nationally scarce meshweb spider. Bee records included the Ridge-saddled Carpenter Bee (*Heriades truncorum*) found by Gail Ashton. The season's final visit was to Lemsford Springs HMWT Nature Reserve where William Bishop ran a moth trap. One significant finding was a Butterbur (*Hydraecia petasitis*) that chose to land on William himself! This moth, unsurprisingly associated with Butterbur, has declined in the county and this record is the only recent sighting. Thanks go to everyone that joined us on these field meetings, with particular thanks to Gail Ashton and William Bishop.

*Monitoring at Heartwood Forest* Wildlife has been monitored at the 347-hectare site since the planting of some 600,000 native trees and shrubs started in 2009. In addition to the new, maturing woodland, the forest includes existing patches of ancient woodland, grassland and a small wetland area.

- *Flora monitoring* during 2023-24 continued to be based on the 10x10m plots along transects from the old woods (Langley and Well and Pudlers' Woods) into adjacent 'new' areas. A recently-coppiced area of Round Wood was surveyed with interesting results that are reported elsewhere in

this journal. The wetland area, which is threatened by invasive plant species, is being monitored annually.

- *Bryophytes* (mosses and liverworts) were recorded during 2023-24 in five compartments planted at Heartwood between 2009-12 (the areas known as 'Broad Walk', 'Festival', 'World Record', 'Sunday Times' and 'Link Wood'). More species than expected – a total of 40 – were identified. Epiphytes are generally slow to colonise young trees, but eight were recorded, particularly on willow trees on many of which *Orthotrichum* species were evident. The dense ground cover of sown fescue grass in the planted areas will reduce as tree canopies expand, so more bryophytes may be able to colonise. In Link Wood a few ground species not recorded elsewhere at Heartwood were found. Two of these – *Rhytidiadelphus loreus* and *R. triquetrus* – are recorded rarely in Hertfordshire, raising a possibility that they were introduced when the trees were planted. Bare soil on mounds and ponds in some compartments provides additional habitat which will continue to be monitored.
- *Butterflies*: the usual transect was surveyed every week from early April to mid-October. The total number of butterflies did not reach the exceptional level of 2019, but were slightly above average for the last nine years. The greatest above-average increases were the Whites and Yellows, due to high numbers of Brimstone and Small White, and Vanessaids, due to record numbers of Red Admiral and Peacock, and high numbers of Comma.
- *Moth* recording included three light trapping sessions (one open to the public) as well as daytime recording. Ten new species were recorded for the site during the year including the discovery of a strong colony of the Lead Coloured Drab Moth (*Orthosia populeti*). The larvae of this local species feed on Aspen (*Populus tremula*) and are a good example of colonisation by woodland species as the forest matures. Other highlights included further examples of Orange Underwing (*Archiearis parthenias*), a day flying species, in March. This species occurs in birch woodland and is another recent colonist. Both this and the scarcer *Archiearis notha* (Light Orange Underwing), whose larvae feed on Aspen, have now been recorded. The Light Orange Underwing flies in early April. Further positive developments were the spread of the Grass Rivulet (*Perizoma albulata*) from a strong core population in the meadow below Well and Pudlers' Woods and comparable expansion for the Small Yellow Underwing (*Panemeria tenebrata*). Both are day flying species in May and early June. The occurrence and spread of these two species indicates the success of current management plans for maintenance and control of the meadow areas.
- *Damsel and Dragonfly* sightings around the wetland area included Common Blue Damselfly, Emperor Dragonfly, Broad-bodied Chaser and Black-tailed Skimmer.
- *Reptiles*: Common Lizards continued to be located in one area of the site, but there is still no evidence that Slow-worms have crossed the border from neighbouring Nomansland.
- *Birds*: Responsibility for the annual Breeding Bird Survey has changed hands twice in the last three years, making it harder to distinguish genuine changes in bird populations (as opposed to differences of approach between the recorders). It is good, however, that someone has taken up the baton each time and trends will surely emerge. During what was a generally poor year for breeding Barn Owls and Kestrels across the UK, 2023 monitoring visits at Heartwood revealed that Barn Owls successfully bred in two nestboxes and failed at one site. They roosted but did not breed at a further site where there was competition with Grey Squirrel. Barn Owls roosted in one of the Kestrel boxes. Kestrels bred and fledged from one nestbox. The monthly bird walk has continued unchanged. Numbers and species were fairly stable during the year, although numbers of Willow Warblers continued to decline with changing habitat. The winter was especially good for sightings of Redwings, Fieldfares and Lesser Redpoll with numbers at least double the previous year.
- *Mammals*: Small mammal trapping took place a month later than usual, in early November, but the mammal numbers were not expected to have fallen much from their late summer peak. The number caught was back up to its usual level (36 traps out of 60), and double the all-time low number caught in October 2022. Wood Mice predominated (28) in the overnight trapping session. There was a record high of Yellow-necked Mice (6), which were found in Pudlers', Langley and Magical Woods. Only two Bank Voles were trapped, well down from the maximum of 13 caught in 2017. No Field Voles or Shrews were caught and there was no reappearance of Harvest Mice, last seen in 2015.

*The Herts Flora Group* held six field meetings between April and August 2023. These covered a diversity of habitats with a view to updating botanical records and taking stock of current management practices and future opportunities. Clothall Common, east of Baldock – a new site created using spoil from constructing the Baldock by-pass – proved unexpectedly diverse and is now one of just a few places Hertfordshire graced by at least one individual of the nationally scarce Lizard Orchid, *Himantoglossum hircinum*. Habitat restoration at Hilfield Park Reservoir led to one of year's best botanical discoveries in the form of Needle Spike-rush (*Eleocharis acicularis*), considered to have become extinct in the county in the mid-1970s. An additional three-day meeting organized by Astrid Biddle in conjunction with two of the UK's expert batologists (batology being the study of brambles!) explored the *Rubus* flora at several locations and recorded over 40 bramble species (or microspecies, depending on preferred terminology).

### **Publications**

*Transactions of the Hertfordshire Natural History Society 2023, Volume 55*

*Part 1: The Hertfordshire Naturalist 2023* was published in September 2023. Thanks go to Stuart Warrington and his editorial team.

*Part 2: The Hertfordshire Bird Report 2022* was published in November 2023. Thanks go to the editor, Clifford Smout and his team.

### **Events**

*Wildfest 2023* – a family-friendly celebration of local wildlife organised by the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, took place in Cassiobury Park, Watford in July. Thanks go to our volunteers who staffed an HNHS / Herts Bird Club stall selling county wildlife atlases and providing free materials about the Society and Hertfordshire wildlife

*Trevor James Memorial Conference* – The many achievements of Hertfordshire naturalist, Trevor James (1947 – 2020) were celebrated at a September conference in Redbourn. More than 50 HNHS/Bird Club members and friends enjoyed a day of talks relating to Trevor's national contribution to biological recording and his particular areas of wildlife interest. Tributes were paid including an account by one of his oldest friends, John Lines, who described how Trevor first became interested in wildlife at Northaw Great Wood as a teenager. June Crew, a friend and participant in legendary field trips read an entertaining poem in Trevor's honour, with further tributes sent by former HNHS President Michael Clark, the Rev'd Tom Gladwin and Judy Adams, former Chief Executive of the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. Graham White described his involvement, with Trevor and Tom Gladwin, in establishing Amwell Nature Reserve. Paul Harding, Head of the Biological Records Centre from 1982 to 2003, presented on Trevor's national contribution, while Trevor's role for more than 40 years as county plant recorder for vascular plants and author of *Flora of Hertfordshire* (2009) was celebrated by current co-recorder Ian Denholm. Stuart Warrington, county recorder for water beetles and bugs, spoke about Trevor's 40-year role as beetles recorder leading to the landmark publication of *Beetles of Hertfordshire* in 2018. Ken Smith, former HNHS Chair and county bird recorder, presented on Hertfordshire's changing birds between the time when Trevor served as editor of the *Herts Bird Report* in the 1980s and the present day. In the concluding session, an HNHS panel discussed with the audience how best to take forward Trevor's legacy. This includes putting £5,000 that he generously bequeathed to the Society to good use. The conversation, was linked to the Society's forthcoming 150th anniversary in 2025, included ideas for engaging children and young people in natural history and how to find and train new county wildlife recorders. Videos of the main presentations can be found on the HNHS YouTube channel.

*Autumn Meeting and Annual General Meeting* – The Autumn Meeting included a presentation by

Nadia Bishara, founder of St Albans Wilderhood Watch which is creating 'green corridors' between gardens on more than 40 streets. Other activities include 'Hedgehog Streets', advice on creating garden ponds and mini-wildlife meadows and events for gardeners to 'swap' pollen-providing plants. Tony Booker, Chair of the Colne Valley Fisheries Consultancy, and Anthony Johns, Fisheries Manager at Sabey's Pool, Rickmansworth described a collaboration with Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust to improve biodiversity. This has included three years of habitat management removing shading trees and create grassy banks attractive to Water Voles and Kingfishers. A third keynote talk was given by Martin Ketcher, presenting the results of a survey he and Amanda Proud undertook for evidence of Water Voles along the Lea Valley between Ware and the Olympic Park in East London. The conference received updates from Roy Woodward on the Hertfordshire Dragonfly and Damselfly Atlas survey and from Chantal Helm on the Mammals, Amphibians and Reptiles Atlas (Herts. MARA) survey, now in its final year. Thanks go to Affinity Water for, again, hosting this event. Videos of the main presentations can be found on the HNHS YouTube channel.

*Gerald Salisbury Memorial Lecture* – Sarah Brockless, ecologist at the Spains Hall Estate in Essex, described how the introduction of Eurasian Beavers has delivered improvements in biodiversity while helping to prevent flooding when she gave the Gerald Salisbury Memorial Lecture in Welwyn Civic Centre in February. Two adult beavers were released in 2019 into an extensive 4.45-hectare enclosure on the 830-hectare estate as part of measures to tackle flooding affecting the nearby village of Finchingfield. Breeding success has meant that up to 14 Beavers now occupy an enclosure whose dams have transformed a former plantation into a wildlife-rich mosaic of ponds, pools, ditches and sunken woodland. They have also slowed a stream flowing towards the village and spread water onto surrounding land. Success has led to two further beaver enclosures being created using farmland on the floodplain. The lecture, attended by around 70 people, was jointly organised by the HNHS and Welwyn Natural History Society.

*Herts Bird Club / British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Conference* – The 2024 Hertfordshire Bird Conference drew a capacity audience at Affinity Water's headquarters in Hatfield in March. Keynote talks were given by Graham White on the fortunes of waterbirds on the restored gravel pits of the Colne Valley and a talk by Herts. Bird Club Chair, Rupert Evershed, on the birds of Stanborough Gravel Pits. The conference included an update from Herts. BTO representative Martin Ketcher on survey work undertaken in the county. Another annual feature was Graham Knight's 'Review of the Year' revealing that 2023 was a particularly good year for county rarities. Some, like a Little Bunting, stayed long enough for many observers to see them, others, like an American Wigeon, were only viewed by one or two observers. The Conference concluded with an open panel discussion on the future of the Herts Bird Club. Among the issues raised were opportunities to embrace social media and the digital world more fully and to achieve greater social diversity among the membership. Hopes were expressed that more young people and members from different ethnic backgrounds could be encouraged to take part. The Herts Bird Photo of the Year competition was won by Andy Day with a picture of a Chiffchaff among blossom. Thanks go to Affinity Water for hosting the conference. Videos of the main presentations can be found on the HNHS YouTube channel.

### *The HNHS Awards for 2023*

In May, Ronni Edmonds-Brown, Chair of the Hertfordshire Recorder's Committee and David Utting, the HNHS Secretary, were delighted to present the Society's Long-Service Award to Raymond Uffen who was County Recorder for Hymenoptera (bees, wasps and sawflies) between 1993 and 2016. His areas of insect expertise also notably extend to Diptera (true flies). The presentation, which was delayed by the Covid outbreak, took place with family and friends at Ray's care home near Stevenage.

Three more exceptional Hertfordshire naturalists were presented with awards at the 2023 Autumn Meeting. Specialist owl ringer Peter Wilkinson was given the Trevor James Award for an

outstanding Hertfordshire naturalist. Since the 1970s he and professional ecologist Colin Shawyer have ringed around 22,000 Barn Owls. Butterfly expert Liz Goodyear, who received the 1875 Award for an outstanding contribution to natural history in the Hertfordshire, is celebrated for her discovery (with London-based naturalist Andrew Middleton) of Purple Emperor colonies across Hertfordshire and extending north through East Anglia. She has been Secretary of the Herts. and Middlesex branch of Butterfly Conservation for more than 20 years.

The Society also presented its Long-Service Award to former Chairman, Peter Delaloye. This was prompted by his retirement, after 25 years of service, from the Herts Bird Club Committee. Peter chaired the committee from 2000 to 2005 before becoming HNHS Chairman from 2005 to 2009. He received the 1875 Award in 2014 to acknowledge his impressive work as a bird ringer and trainer.

### ***Financial review***

Since 2020 the Society's accounts have been published separately at a time nearer to the Annual General Meeting, rather than in the *Hertfordshire Naturalist*. The 2022-23 accounts, as approved at the 2023 AGM, can be viewed at <https://www.hnhs.org/contact-us/hnhs-management-committee>.

### ***Volunteers***

The Society is managed and run entirely by volunteers. We are grateful to all our volunteers for their continuing hard work, not least the county recorders, the editors of our two journals and those moderating and updating the websites.

### ***Members' news***

We record, with sadness, the death of long-standing HNHS member Mic Wells, who lived at Marsworth. We also pay tribute to Doug Marriott, a national authority on spiders based in Croxley Green, who was County Recorder from 1994 to 2016 and to Stephen Lings, an entomologist and all-round natural historian who was County Recorder for Hymenoptera (bees and wasps) and for millipedes and centipedes. Obituaries for Doug and Steve will appear in the *Hertfordshire Naturalist*.

### ***Structure, governance and management***

The Society is a registered charity, governed by a formal constitution. A series of amendments agreed at the 2023 AGM chiefly consisted of administrative changes. These included an adjustment to rules regarding the appointment of management committee members (the charity's trustees), and updated arrangements for handling potential conflicts of interest. A new clause, using 'model' wording approved by the Charity Commission, was approved that specifies exceptional circumstances in which a trustee may receive a benefit from the charity or enter into a contract with the Society for the supply of services or goods. Other changes recognise the use of online meetings, electronic minute keeping and online banking arrangements. Timing of the AGM is now linked specifically to Charity Commission requirement for the annual accounts to be submitted by the end of January. The Commission's requirement for independent examination of accounts when annual gross income exceeds a specified minimum (currently £25,000) was incorporated into the constitution.

The Trustees of the Society and other members of the Management Committee continue to be elected each autumn at the Annual General Meeting. In October 2023, 13 members of the Society's Management Committee were elected at the AGM, all of whom serve as trustees (see table below). We were sorry to lose the services of Jack Fearnside as a Bird Club representative on the committee and thank him warmly for his six years of membership. The good news is that Jack will continue to apply his outstanding design expertise to the *Hertfordshire Naturalist* and the *Herts Bird Report*, as well as other HNHS publications.

During the year the Committee met five times, in May, July, September, November and February. Membership of the Society is stable at just over 500.

*Members of the Management Committee elected in 2022 and 2023*

<b>Role</b>	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>2023/24</b>
Chair	Peter Tallantire*	Peter Tallantire*
Treasurer	Dan Fletcher*	Chris Ruis*
Secretary and Registrar	David Utting*	David Utting*
Membership Secretary	Martin Ketcher*	Martin Ketcher*
Chair of Recorders' Committee	Veronica Edmonds Brown*	Veronica Edmonds Brown*
Editor, Hertfordshire Naturalist	Stuart Warrington*	Stuart Warrington*
Events	Tim Hill*	Tim Hill*
Herts Bird Club	Rupert Evershed*	Rupert Evershed*
Herts Bird Club	Jack Fearnside	
Recording	Agneta Burton*	Agneta Burton*
Recording	Ian Carle*	Ian Carle*
Recording	Alex Waechter*	Alex Waechter*
Special projects	Chantal Helm*	Chantal Helm*
Special projects	Chris James*	Chris James*

(\* MC members who are also HNHS Trustees)

***Administrative information***

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

**HNHS Management Committee  
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for publication in the *Hertfordshire Naturalist 2024*.**