



The following is a summary by Officers and members with specific responsibilities, setting out the Society's achievements during 2020 under the heading of the relevant Committee where applicable.

The objectives of the Society and the Strategies for achieving them can be seen in the Trustees' report and on our website.

<https://www.sos.org.uk/about-the-sos>

All activities from mid-March onwards were carried out in accordance with government restrictions implemented in the Covid-19 pandemic.

SUSSEX ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

COUNCIL

At the 2020 Zoom AGM which was held on Saturday 18th July due to the virus pandemic; Richard Black and Chris Lowmass retired from Council; and Matt Twydell was elected on to Council. At the first meeting of Council in May, Mike Russell was elected as Chair. The members of Council are the Trustees of the Society.

COMMITTEES

The work of Council is hugely supported by the work of the Society's two main committees (within which there are various sub-committees). Committee membership as of 31 December 2020 was as follows (an * denotes that the committee member is also an elected member of Council):

Scientific Committee Mark Mallalieu* (Chair), Clare Buckle (Secretary), Dave Boddington, Richard Cowser*, Dr Helen Crabtree, Dr John Newnham, Dr Peter Plant*, Dr Ken Smith, Matt Twydell*.

Records Committee Mark Mallalieu* (Recorder), Martin Orchard-Webb (Assistant Recorder), Bola Akinola, Chris Ball, Derek Barber, David Campbell, Jake Everitt, Simon Linington, Alan Parker, Matt Phelps, Laurence Pitcher and Mike Scott-Ham.

Bird Report Dr Peter Plant* (Editor) supported by Editorial Team; Graham Hughes (Assistant Editor), Chris Barfield, Joanne Chattaway, John Hobson, Paul James, Mark Mallalieu*, Dr John Newnham, Laurence Pitcher and Dr Ken Smith.

Membership & Publicity Committee Val Bentley (Chair), Chris Brown, Martin Daniel* (Newsletter Editor), Tim Squire (Conference Organiser), John Trowell (Membership Secretary), Audrey Wende, Dr Mark (D M) Wright (Outings Organiser), Rob Yarham* (Press and Publicity Officer).

Outings/Programme Committee Dr Mark (D M) Wright (Outings Organiser), Bernie Forbes, Audrey Wende.

To all those who have retired from Council and the Society's committees during 2020, our very sincere thanks for all your hard work and efforts. We are particularly grateful for the long-standing Scientific Committee contributions of John Hobson, Alan Perry and Barrie Watson, all of whom retired from the Scientific Committee in 2020.

REPORT OF COUNCIL

TREASURER'S REPORT

Sussex Ornithological Society once again had a financially positive year in 2020. Income from members' subscriptions, legacies, donations and Gift Aid was £39,362 The Society is extremely grateful to members for all donations received, all monies given to the Society will be used to support conservation projects. This is because our subscription income covers the cost of member services and administration. We are particularly grateful for the legacies left to the Society by individuals remembering SOS in their wills.

During the year, the Society donated a total of £51,130 for conservation projects. Donations to the RSPB of £10,000 towards the biodiversity project at Pulborough Brooks, £15,000 for the lake restoration at Broadwater Warren and £2,594 for removable deer fencing at Broadwater Warren and Rowlands Wood. To SWT, £21,185 towards habitat management at Amberley Wild Brooks. We funded the purchase of Swift nest boxes and sound equipment for the Lewes Swift Society. Finally, £500 towards the ongoing Chichester Cathedral Peregrine nesting project.

Thank you to all members (circa 1,000) who renew their Society membership by standing order, thus saving much time and effort. Please remember to inform me if your tax status changes and you are no longer able to gift aid membership and donations to the Charity.

You probably remember that this was the first year of the Society's new accountancy package XERO. During the year everything has gone very smoothly and being extremely easy to operate. Having our accountants Kreston Reeves in the background is an asset. This year and going forward they will be carrying out the Independent Examination of the Society's accounts.

Updating you all on a few facts-with this year's additions the Society has donated over £406,000 to deserving projects since 1972. Gift aid is again well supported by members and we have to date claimed over £70,000 from HMRC. The Bird Race continues to be successful and the sum now raised since 2002 stands at just over £30,700, including gift aid.

Ted Merrikin Treasurer

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

As a result of the pandemic, business for the April meeting was conducted by email only, then by Zoom from June onwards. Alan Perry, John Hobson and Dr Barrie Watson all indicated their intention to stand-down from the Committee prior to the April meeting, which would have been their final face to face meeting. Between them, they have contributed an extraordinary 80 years of service to the Scientific Committee, with Barrie having been a member since the late 1970s and Alan and John for twenty years each. The Society has benefited enormously from all the work they have done, and we are extremely grateful for their service.

At the April meeting, Mark Mallalieu was re-elected as Chair of Scientific Committee and Matt Twydell was welcomed as Surveys and Projects Officer, taking over from Richard Black whose term ended at the 2020 AGM. The Committee expressed gratitude to Richard for the great work he has done in this role, and appreciation that along with Matt, Richard will continue running the Marsh Tit survey and writing up the Marsh (and Willow) Tit surveys.

The SOS Fieldworkers' Meeting planned for October unfortunately had to be cancelled. The Committee is grateful to Ken and Linda Smith for their hard work in preparing for this event which it is hoped can take place in 2021.

During 2020 proposals were published for an extension to the Rampion wind farm. Former County Bird Recorder David Howey has been monitoring the Kittiwake colony at Seaford Head and offered to represent SOS at meetings regarding the new proposals and to provide updates to Scientific Committee and the Conservation Team.

Throughout the year, the Committee maintained oversight of the society's important work on records, the database, surveys, conservation and archiving as reported in more detail in other sections of this report.

Clare Buckle, Secretary to Scientific Committee

ARCHIVES

There have been no significant changes to the electronic archives this year and no new material added to the old paper archives held at the West Sussex Record Office in Chichester. The archive has been regularly updated with the usual committee minutes and supporting documents; and with special thanks to work by Mark Mallalieu and his assistant, the 2019 Records Committee decisions have been collated and added to the files.

Mark (CMV) Wright, Archivist

CONSERVATION

The government is making two very substantial changes that will impact wildlife habitats – changes in the way that the local planning systems will work, and in the ways that farmers will be paid subsidies. Exactly what the effect of these fundamental changes will be for wildlife should become clearer in 2021.

In the meantime, Local Authorities are continuing to undertake extensive consultations on their Local Plans, and during the year the SOS commented on the draft Horsham Local Plan, the final Crawley Local Plan and the final Brighton & Hove City Plan, Part 2. We also responded to documents entitled "Direction of Travel" for Eastbourne and for Wealden DC (which are public consultations on broad strategy that will subsequently be reflected in more detailed Local Plans). We usually liaise with other conservation groups

when responding to these documents, and towards the end of the year a regular monthly liaison meeting on planning issues was set up between ourselves and three other groups; SWT, RSPB, and CPRE, which will allow us to better co-ordinate our responses to Local Authority plans.

We have also been busy during the year responding to other matters. We successfully procured protection for a breeding Marsh Harrier in West Sussex when it was threatened by some preliminary development work, and we gave advice which led to a breeding Hobby's nest being protected in the Horsham area. We brought attention to the impact that flooding at the mouth of the Cuckmere was having upstream on the Charleston Reedbed Reserve and ringing site, which was one of several severe local problems caused by this flooding. Agreement was eventually reached to unblock the mouth of the Cuckmere, which was the cause of the flooding.

We completed another year of surveying where wintering Brent Geese forage in the Pagham/Medmerry area, and for the second (very wet) winter running there were virtually no records of Brent using alternative fields that developers of a 490-house scheme along Pagham Road have proposed as mitigation for the proven Brent-foraging site that they want to build on. We have also worked with the RSPB to object to the proposed redevelopment of Medmerry Holiday Village over the next 10 years. It is proposed to greatly expand in area, with two-storey holiday homes overlooking the Stilt Pool once major flood defence works have been undertaken. We have objected on the basis that the scale of the redevelopment is inappropriate for this special wild corner of West Sussex and that plans for managing the threat of increased recreational disturbance on nesting birds in the RSPB Medmerry Reserve are inadequate.

We have become involved with Combe Haven Countryside Park (Bexhill/Hastings) and are trying to work with local groups and authorities, to see whether things can be done to improve the Park for wildlife, including birds. SWT - whose Filsham Reedbed is within the Park - is also involved.

Updating Local Wildlife Site (LWS) citations has slowed this year as Covid-19 restrictions reduced the amount of time SWT's LWS coordinator could undertake site surveys. Nonetheless, the new Goring Gap LWS, which has been designated from evidence submitted last year regarding its importance for birds, was finally signed off and made public. SOS are now providing the bird input to the technical assessments that are presented when LWS citations are reviewed, and SOS members have helped enormously with these inputs. This is a prime example of the way that SOS's records, supplemented by the local knowledge of our members, can be used to provide informed evidence that helps bird conservation.

I am extremely grateful for all the help the SOS conservation team have given throughout the year.

Richard Cowser, Conservation Officer

CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT

The Society has management responsibility for the following two sites:

Charleston Reedbed

Another disastrous beginning for much needed conservation work that was necessary for the upkeep of the reedbed. With the Environmental Agency (EA) still unwilling to clear the river-mouth of the Cuckmere, the previous year's flooding continued. Hence access was not possible, and the ringing group could not do any remedial work. Then of course, the Covid-19 lockdown happened, meaning a work party from the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) had to be cancelled. After much discussion, letters of objection (including one from the SOS) and much publicity in the local press, the EA finally relented and during September the river-mouth was cleared.

Despite Covid restrictions being partially lifted in late spring, the breeding season was still in full swing, so any further work was out of the question. Back came more stringent guidelines and therefore a further two work parties from the SOS and the SDNPA had to be cancelled. The flooding did abate after a lengthy interval and consequently the ringing group managed to operate with strict distancing rules in place during the partial lifting of lockdown. There was again a general lack of wildlife, (mammals, reptiles, and invertebrates) as was apparent in 2019.

Some management work was carried out by the ringing group but was restricted to one person at a time during November.

Once again, we are indebted to the ringing group for doing as much as they could and of course to Richard Brown, the landowner, for allowing the SOS to manage this invaluable site.

Tim Parmenter

New Lake and Ivy Lake Reedbed

The continued presence of breeding and roosting Cormorants at New Lake in recent years has weakened the trees they use, and spring gales brought many of them down. From the presence of fledged juveniles, it would appear that a few pairs may have successfully bred but numbers will have been well down on last year. This SOS managed Nature Reserve remains one of the least disturbed gravel pits around Chichester and it continues to attract good numbers of wintering waterfowl.

Richard Cowser, Conservation Officer

DATABASE

During the year, the Society added almost 403K records for 2019 to its database, an increase of almost 20% on 2018. Over 70% of these came from the BTO's BirdTrack recording system and the proportion of records from this system continues to increase. More details of the breakdown of

the 2019 records are contained in the 72nd Sussex Bird Report. The 2019 records (less WeBS, BBS, and those marked confidential) that the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre (SxBRC) had not already received directly were copied to them.

During 2020 over 640k records were received, including a number from years prior to 2020, suggesting some observers were using lockdown time to input data from their notebooks. This will be detailed in the next report.

The Society's multi-user online database CoBRA2 (C2) continues to function very well and is still evolving as experience of using it prompts further developments. During 2020 the record extraction module was used 2,450 occasions by 38 users on over 300 days of the year, and the Account Writers module was accessed on 545 occasions by 46 different users on 121 different dates.

Despite the extensive automated record checking programmed into the new database, there was still much work to be done by the Database Manager (Dr John Newnham) and Recorder (Mark Mallalieu) in contacting observers to query records. Other tasks, such as answering further requests for data, have also been completed by the Society's Database Manager, Dr John Newnham.

Chris Brown, the Society's Webmaster, and his colleague Andy Lawrence have continued to be very responsive to changes required to the database. Council continues to be extremely grateful to John for his ongoing work on database matters, and to Chris and Andy for the continuing work they are undertaking in adding new features to CoBRA2.

Clare Buckle, Secretary to Scientific Committee

RECORDS

The summary information presented here relates mainly to 2019 as records for 2020 are still being analysed. A total of 264 species was recorded in 2019, compared to 262 in 2018. Descriptions were provided in relation to 204 records of scarce or rare species and subspecies, of which 179 were accepted by the SOS Records Committee (SOSRC) and ten by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC). Data were forwarded to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, which publishes its annual report in British Birds. Data were also provided for inclusion in the annual scarce migrant's report in the same journal. A report on birds was published in the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre annual report 'ADASTRA', as in previous years.

At least six pairs of Honey-buzzards bred successfully in 2019, whilst 21 Goshawk pairs, and perhaps 34 territories, was further evidence of the species' rapid increase in the county. Five pairs of Marsh Harriers bred successfully, compared to four in 2018 and one in 2017. At least three pairs of Stone-curlews were confirmed breeding. Six pairs of Long-eared Owls were found; this is a much under-recorded breeding species in

Sussex. Although about 89 pairs of Avocets nested at three sites, hardly any young fledged. A survey of Turtle Doves produced an estimate of 80 territories (range 50 - 100). Near West Dean, an unprecedented 50 Hawfinches, including juveniles, were found in early September 2019 (and over 80 in early September 2020).

Among rarer species in 2019, a remarkable find was of a deceased Yellow-billed Cuckoo in Seaford on 2 October, a Nearctic species discovered during a spell when transatlantic vagrants were making landfall in the far west of England. Black Storks were found on three dates during the summer, relating to probably two individuals. A Finnish-ringed Pallid Harrier at Beachy Head on 17-18 September was the county's third record, and a Crag Martin at the same site on 22 May was the fourth for the county and the third for the Beachy Head area. A Squacco Heron at Pagham Harbour attracted many admirers over a period of ten days in August after appearing for one day in June. The Hume's Warbler first found in December 2018 at Newhaven remained until 30 January. Cattle Egrets continued to increase, with up to 26 at Pagham Harbour (and they then bred at two sites in 2020); the species was removed from the list of those requiring descriptions, along with Goshawk and Yellow-browed Warbler.

The work of the Recorder could not be done without the excellent work of the members of the SOSRC who assess records of scarce and rare species or subspecies, and the dedication of the Assistant Recorder. The team ensured that evidence for as many records as possible of scarce and rare species was collated and assessed efficiently. As ever, the three volunteers who process paper records for the database provided essential and much appreciated support, and John Newnham gave invaluable assistance in his role as Database Manager.

Mark Mallalieu, Recorder

SPECIES ACTION

Barn Owls

The SOS has increased the annual budget available to the Barn Owl Study Group for the purchase of nest boxes to be placed on trees and in buildings. There has been an encouraging increase in the number of members offering to help put up boxes and to monitor their use under licence. The Study Group is also able to advise landowners on habitat management to improve food supplies for owls.

Barrie Watson

Swifts

In my first full year as Swift Champion, it was inspiring to see that despite the pandemic, most of the local Swift groups still managed to forge good progress in 2020. I prepared an advice sheet on playing calls to attract

nesting Swifts, as well as forms for recording Swift activity, and these are available on request.

Progress was made with local planning authorities this year. In Brighton, the RSPB and SOS worked together to ask for strengthened wording regarding the requirement for suitable developments to include the installation of Swift bricks/boxes and this was also achieved in Lewes. In Horsham, SOS and local conservation project "Wild About Warnham" persuaded Horsham District Council to make the provision of Swift bricks a planning condition on a planning application for the conversion of an agricultural building at Broomlands Farm (Warnham) into four houses. The development is now provisioned to go ahead with Swift bricks.

The Hastings and Rother Swift Conservation Group went from strength to strength, building its membership and providing and installing nest-boxes on request (22 by November), as well as securing a successful outcome for three pairs of Swifts nesting in a building where work was taking place.

Lewes Swift Supporters installed 27 nest-boxes. They also recorded 19 active nests at St. Anne's Church, where rubble was cleared to improve access for the birds.

The Chichester Festival Theatre got in touch with an interest in installing Swift boxes on their main building. Unfortunately, this proved impossible during the pandemic, but it is hoped they will be put up in 2021. Crawley, Haywards Heath, Steyning and Worthing were identified as settlements with clear potential for local Swift groups to make a difference. If you would like help setting up a local Swift group, then I would love to hear from you.

David Campbell

SURVEYS

In 2020 Dr Richard Black organised a Marsh Tit survey. The survey protocol used playback to find birds setting up territory. Sixty-five 1km squares were randomly selected across the entire county and surveyors were found for 61 of these. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 lockdown meant that the survey had to be abandoned mid-way through the survey period. Nevertheless 29 squares were surveyed, although some of these received only one visit out of the two planned visits. SOS has followed BTO guidance for surveys in lockdown and will only attempt to rerun this survey in 2021 if restrictions are reduced. If the survey is completed in 2021, the full results will then be published in the 2021 Sussex Bird Report. All surveys in 2021 will be dependent on Covid-19 restrictions. As well as the Marsh Tit survey, SOS plans to participate in a national Turtle Dove survey.

Mark Mallalieu organised a survey of Honey-buzzards as part of the national survey, achieving extensive though incomplete coverage. The national survey continues in 2021 and further fieldwork will be done in Sussex with a view to covering at least some of the sites not surveyed in 2020.

Following a request from Forestry England (FE), a survey of breeding Nightingales and Turtle Doves in Chiddingfold Forest was planned in 2020.

The forest is a collection of large SSSI woodlands which sit on the Sussex/Surrey border. The survey was planned as a joint project with the Surrey Bird Club. After lockdown in March, it was decided to postpone until 2021. The easing of restrictions in late May allowed some searches of the woods within Sussex. Although Nightingales were still singing it was too late in the season for a formal survey. However, it was not too late for Turtle Doves with purring birds found in two of the three woods searched. It is hoped that restrictions will be relaxed sufficiently for a full survey in 2021 but the situation will be kept under review. FE are happy with this approach.

The following long-term annual surveys continued to be carried out in 2020 (survey co-ordinator's name in brackets):

(a) The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), (Helen Crabtree), 127 1km squares were surveyed mostly with late season visits only by 102 volunteers. Most results were submitted online. Population trends for 1994-2019 have been provided by the BTO and results and trend tables for 40 species were prepared for the 2019 Sussex Bird Report.

(b) Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS), (Helen Crabtree and Dave Boddington). Most of the main sites in Sussex were covered in 2019/2020.

(c) Co-ordinated sea-watching records for 2019 were summarised in the 72nd *Sussex Bird Report* by John Newnham. Sea-watching records for 2020 are still being collected.

(d) The 2020 Heronries Census (Helen Crabtree) Counts were completed at 29 sites in 2020 and eight of these contained Little Egrets whilst three contained Cattle Egrets. Additionally, four inland Cormorant colonies were monitored.

(e) The Wealden Heaths Breeding Bird Survey – West Sussex (Alan Perry) is now an independent SOS survey covering 12 heathland sites in 2020. Lockdown had a major impact on this survey with only one site, Black Down, able to be fully surveyed. Four sites missed April visits and five further sites received less than four visits. Two sites were unable to be surveyed.

(f) Three Waterways Breeding Bird Surveys (WBBS) (Helen Crabtree) were carried out.

(g) In winter 2019/20 the Sussex Winter Bird Surveys (Christine George) were completed for a ninth year. Despite the pandemic, there was an increase in the number of squares for which records were submitted. 138 1km squares were surveyed by 90 volunteers and 118 species were recorded, including some escapes and introductions. Although some squares received just one visit, most squares were able to receive both visits. Firsts for the year were Water Pipit, Great Grey Shrike, Black Redstart and Ring-necked Parakeet.

(h) The "South Downs Farmland Bird Initiative" farmland bird survey (Helen Crabtree) was completed for the seventh year with the aim of trying to determine breeding population trends for bird species that are dependent on farmland. Volunteers surveyed 85 1km squares within the National Park (in both Sussex and Hampshire - including 60 BBS squares). Details can be

found on the South Downs Farmland Bird Initiative website
www.sdfarmbirds.com.

(i) Woodcock Survey – Thirteen squares were surveyed in Sussex for this annual survey.

(j) The “Urban Breeding Gull Survey” was largely suspended in 2020, although a handful of squares were surveyed by people living locally to their square. Consultants were contracted to survey squares without volunteers, and it is hoped that pandemic permitting, greater coverage can be achieved by re-surveying in 2021.

All surveys for 2021 will be dependent on Covid-19 restrictions but optimistically looking forward, the Society will be aiming to seek volunteers to repeat some squares of the Marsh Tit survey, and the Society plans to participate in a National Turtle Dove survey.

As always, a huge number of volunteers were involved in all these activities and the Society is grateful for the efforts of all those who have contributed so much time and effort to this work.

Matt Twydell, Surveys and Projects Officer

SUSSEX BIRD REPORT

The 2019 Sussex Bird Report was published and delivered to members in late November 2020. The 272-page report consisted of the systematic list summarising the 264 species recorded during 2019 plus Escapes and Introductions, augmented with maps, tables and photographs. It also included the Review of the Year, BBS and SWBS results, the Ringing Report, updated First and last Migrant Dates, the Wealden Heaths Breeding Bird Survey table and Finders’ Accounts for Notable Species in 2019 (Crag Martin, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Northern Treecreeper and Eastern Lesser Whitethroat). Scientific papers covered Turtle Doves breeding in Sussex and the History of the Knepp Mill Pond Heronry. Changes arising from the adoption of IOC taxonomy and nomenclature (World Bird List V10.2) were incorporated throughout the Report.

The drafting and production of the Report involved a team of about 50 people, consisting of species account writers, proof-readers, sub-editors, the writers of the various articles, and those concerned with the many superb photographs. SOS is extremely fortunate to have such a large, willing, and dedicated team; and as editor I would like to thank all involved. Special mention must go to the other members of the Editorial Team; Chris Barfield, Joanne Chattaway, John Hobson, Graham Hughes, Paul James, John Newnham, the Honorary Recorder Mark Mallalieu, Laurence Pitcher and Ken Smith.

Peter Plant, Editor of the Sussex Bird Report

MEMBERSHIP & PUBLICITY COMMITTEE

The Membership & Publicity Committee held one face to face meeting in February 2020 before Covid-19 pandemic restrictions arrived, and thereafter discussed matters by email. Anthony Holden very kindly held the fort as Newsletter Editor until Martin Daniel was able to take over the reins in the autumn, in time to produce the winter edition. As well as the responsibilities self-evident from its title, the Committee oversees the Conference, Newsletter, New Year Bird Race, the SOS website and social media (Twitter and Facebook). Unfortunately, the evening meeting for volunteers, known as the President's Evening, was unable to take place in 2020.

CONFERENCE

It seems like a different world back in January 2020 when we had over 230 people together in Clair Hall, before face masks were a thing. There was a theme of Seabirds for three of the four speakers. David Howey gave us an entertaining summary of his SOS funded study of the Kittiwake colony at Splash Point, Seaford. Dr Viola Ross-Smith from the BTO presented an informative talk on the whole array of challenges facing our seabirds from hunting and plastic pollution to overfishing and windfarms. Jane Smith's evocative talk about the bird life of the Hebridean Islands where she lives was illustrated by her beautiful screen prints. And finally, Lucy Groves, the newly appointed White Stork Project Officer at Knepp, gave an excellent talk about how the project is progressing with some fascinating information about the movements of some of the Knepp Storks.

Thank you to all the volunteers who make the Conference such a great event especially Audrey Wende and Val Bentley.

Tim Squire, Conference Organiser

MEMBERSHIP

In compiling this report, I have referred to my records of previous years to assess how the Society's membership numbers have varied from year to year and particularly over the past decade. Despite the regular losses each year due to factors such as failure to renew subscriptions, moves away from Sussex, resignations for reasons unknown and sadly, members passing away, we nevertheless recorded a reasonable continued growth. Our total membership at the end of 2020 is 240 more than at the end of 2011. However, the numbers also show a net loss of members in five of those years balanced out and increased by a net gain in the other five.

In total, whilst we had recruited/reinstated 1,387 members in the decade, we have lost over 1000 due the reasons listed above, including 150 who have passed away.

During the past year it was noticeable that after January (when we recruited 18 new members), the number of new members was in single figures for nine months but was then followed by a substantial increase to 42 new members during November and December. We can only guess, but perhaps the sharp rise resulted from the special offer on our website of a free Sussex Bird Report for new members.

We continue to aim to increase our appeal to young people although our current membership total of 1,935 members at the year-end sadly indicates no significant change to our numbers of student and under age 21 members.

John Trowell, Membership Secretary

SOCIETY AWARDS

At the January Conference, Alan Perry was delighted to present Awards to several deserving members.

The 2020 President's Award was given to Ken and Linda Smith. Although they had only recently moved to Sussex, they quickly became involved with SOS and in 2019 put forward the idea of a SOS Fieldworkers' Meeting. This was promptly organised by them for September of that year and was well-attended by both SOS members and others involved in fieldwork. They had started to arrange another meeting for 2020, but obviously this could not take place. Hopefully though there will be more to come.

Three members received long-service Stonechat Awards.

Andrew Guest was asked to be a 10km steward for SOS just before the first winter atlas in 1981 and has carried out virtually all the SOS/BTO surveys in TQ33 since then. He was also a familiar figure at SOS Conference, guiding late arrivals to empty chairs, and has only recently handed over the torch!

Nick Paul's first official role with SOS was as the Examiner of Accounts in the early 2000's. Since then, he has acted as Editor of the Sussex Bird Report from 2004-2009, County Bird Recorder from 2010-2011, and Chairman of Council from 2010 to 2014. He is currently working with the Conservation team.

Jerry Whitman is one of those members quietly beaver away for SOS over many years. He first started helping the Recorder in 1998 by entering data submitted on paper record forms, and still performs this task as well as writing several species accounts for the Sussex Bird Report from 2003 onwards.

These Awards are a small token to demonstrate how much the Society values the many hours of hard work our members put into supporting it – it could not function without them.

Val Bentley, Chair M & P Committee

NEWSLETTER

The successful publication of the newsletter throughout 2020 despite the profound uncertainties caused by the pandemic is testament to the

resourcefulness and resilience of the Society's members. While much of the normal business of the society and activities of its members was disrupted, members' contributions and photographs ensured that four high quality newsletters were produced as usual.

Recognition is particularly due to those members who contribute regularly, including Elliot Chandler and Matt Eade, who wrote the sightings reports over the year. Similarly, Mark Mallallieu provided the Recorder's page throughout 2020. Our thanks are due to them and to all others who contributed.

We are also extremely grateful to Val Bentley and Audrey Wende who continued to provide valuable support and advice. Together with Mags and Peter Whitcomb who continued their unseen but essential behind-the-scenes work in the mailing of the newsletters in 2020.

Most members continue to prefer to have a printed copy, although the number opting to have the newsletter delivered by e-mail did increase by approximately 15 during the year, and we continue to encourage this option wherever possible.

A changeover of Newsletter Editor is always a complex task, and that was compounded by the impact of the pandemic. In this context, special thanks are due to Anthony Holden for his unfailingly wise and patient advice, and substantial continued input, during the transition process at the end of 2020.

Martin Daniel, Newsletter Editor

NEW YEAR BIRD RACE

Seventeen teams took part in the 2020 Race during the first two weeks of January, with over 50 members involved. There were 135 species recorded, three fewer than in 2019, but still an excellent combined total; of these, 17 species were seen by all teams and 11 by only one. The joint winners were the Martlets and the Rolling Turnstones, who both recorded 101 species. In joint 3rd place, as in 2019, were the Dynamic Duo and Mike's Mergansers. Many of the teams have been competing for years, with no expectation of winning, but just enjoying the challenge of trying to achieve their personal best! The total raised (including gift aid) was £3,277.65, one of the highest amounts to date. Thanks to all who participated, and to our Treasurer, who not only led his team, but chased up all the gift aid to help boost the funds which go towards conservation projects detailed elsewhere in the Annual Report.

Val Bentley, Chair M & P Committee

OUTINGS

Prior to the Covid-19 restrictions coming into force in March, three outings had been held in January, to Rye Harbour, Church Norton and West

Dean Woods; one in February, to Cuckmere Haven; and two in March, a trip to Dungeness postponed from January due to bad weather, and lastly a walk at Old Lodge on the 21st. Among the more unusual species seen were Smew, Spotted Redshank, Hawfinch, Goshawk, Goosander, Red-throated Diver, Glaucous Gull, Goldeneye, Water Pipit and Marsh Harrier.

In September and October, a programme of walks for small groups were arranged in compliance with restrictions in force at that time, with a leader plus a maximum of five participants. These walks were to Arlington Reservoir, Birling Gap/Shooters Bottom and Cissbury Ring. Restrictions were tightened again in November leading to all outings being suspended.

Mark (D M) Wright, Outings Organiser

PRESS & PUBLICITY

Seven media releases were issued to media contacts in the press, TV and radio during the year to promote the Society's announcements and activities, as well as publicising sponsored conservation projects.

Social media formed a large part of the Society's interaction with the public during 2020, with Mya Bambrick running the Society's Twitter and Instagram accounts. Followers and engagement with the Society through social media continues to develop as a result. At the beginning of 2021, the SOS Facebook page had accumulated 1,025 followers and 890 likes, and our Twitter page now has 2,616 followers. A Photographic Competition has generated more interest during the latter part of the year, as did the announcement of the Society's online Annual Conference.

To keep up with all the latest news, including Society events, walks, projects and Sussex bird sightings, as well as bird news and science in and beyond Sussex, follow us on Twitter at @sussexornitholo, on Instagram at @sussexornitholo, and 'like' our Facebook page on facebook.com/ornitholosussex.

Rob Yarham, Press and Publicity Officer

WEBSITE

In complete contrast to events in the world outside, 2020 was a relatively uneventful year in the life of the SOS website. The only new development was an investigation, carried out in October, into the possibility of adding the facility to join the Society via online application. This gave encouraging results and work on adding this feature will recommence in the New Year.

As always, thanks go to the Sightings Team, led by Paul James, for their efforts during the year in not only maintaining the Recent Sightings page but also in responding to identification requests received via email.

Chris Brown, Webmaster

Biodiversity Boost for Pulborough Brooks



Credit: Eleanor Bentall [rspbimages.com](https://www.rspbimages.com)

We are delighted to report that our Biodiversity Boost project at Pulborough Brooks is now moving forward. The required paperwork for the Biffa Award has been finalised after several delays relating to Covid-19 and we have received the first payment. We have now arranged for a contractor to start work on site in July 2021. This will offer optimal weather for the completion of the project, avoid disturbance during the breeding season and allows time for lockdown restrictions to ease.

The site staff have been busy clearing vegetation along the fence line in preparation for the fence installation and groundworks in the summer. We cannot wait for the project to get underway and look forward to showing you the difference your support is making with an update next summer and perhaps even (Covid-19 permitting) a visit in person!

Minutes of the Fifty-eighth ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the members of the SUSSEX ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY held by Online Zoom Meeting due to the Covid-19 pandemic on Saturday 18 July 2020, at 2.30 p.m.

PRESENT: 21 Members attending by Zoom were welcomed by President Alan Perry, with a further 41 Members having contributed postal or email voting slips.

- 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were received from four members – Val Bentley, Anthony Holden, David Howey and Matt Twydell. We apologise for the unusual circumstances with Covid-19 which has meant that there will be some SOS members who might usually like to attend the AGM for whom attendance at Zoom Meetings would not be possible, and hence postal or email voting was made available to ensure that all members who wished to take part were able to do so.
- 2 THE MINUTES OF THE 57TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING were unanimously approved as a true and accurate reflection of that meeting. (Proposer Ted Merrikin/ Seconder John Newnham).
- 3 The amendment to **Society Rule 9(b)(iii)** was approved with just one vote against, and the rule will now read; “subject to the following provisions of this sub-paragraph” that any person who has held the office of a member of the Council for five such consecutive periods shall not be eligible for re-election as a member of Council at the Annual General Meeting at which the last of such periods comes to an end; or for appointment by the Council under Rule 18 at any time until after the Annual General Meeting next following the Annual General Meeting; provided that, should it not be possible to identify a suitable replacement candidate to Council to hold office, Council may, should the incumbent be willing, accept a proposal to reappoint the outgoing officer until such time as the position can be filled by a suitable replacement. At that time the incumbent will step down and the replacement will be co-opted onto Council in accordance with Rule 18 until the next following Annual General Meeting at which he/she will be able to stand for election. (Proposer Ted Merrikin/ Seconder Sue Walsh).

The amendment to **Society Rule 14** was unanimously approved and will now read; The Treasurer shall keep the accounts of the Society and shall make up the Annual Statement of Financial Activities and Balance Sheet to the 31st December in each year which will be circulated amongst the members with the notice of the Annual General Meeting. The Treasurer shall produce at the Annual General Meeting for inspection by members, a copy of the examined accounts as at the 31st December of the preceding year, and the

Treasurer shall confirm to the Annual General Meeting whether the examined accounts are identical to those previously circulated to members. The accounts will be examined in accordance with the rules of the Charity Commission by a suitably qualified firm of accountants who have experience in acting for Charities. The firm shall be appointed at the Annual General Meeting to examine and certify the Annual Statement of Financial Activities and Balance Sheet in the ensuing year. If this firm for any reason becomes unable (temporarily or permanently) to perform its duties during its term of office, the Council may appoint an alternative firm to act in its stead until such time (not being later than the next Annual General Meeting) as the Council may appoint. (Proposer Brian Osborne/ Seconder Rob Yarham).

- 4 The REPORT OF COUNCIL, previously circulated to members, was presented by Mike Russell, Chair of Council, and adopted by the meeting. During his first year as Chair of Council, Mike outlined how he has been astounded at the amount of work that Council, Committee members and other volunteers put into the Society, and thanked everyone for their contribution throughout 2019-20. This year the Covid-19 pandemic has brought many changes to our planned activities, but we have continued to function in every area where we are permitted to do so, particularly in relation to production of the Bird Report and Newsletter and with regard to planning and conservation issues. With the development of Zoom online meeting technology, Council and our committees can continue to meet and discuss business on a regular basis. (Proposer Peter Plant/ Seconder Ken Smith).
- 5 The Treasurer presented the ACCOUNTS. He thanked Geoff Wenden our previous Treasurer for designing the accountancy package used by the Society for the last 15 plus years. He outlined why it was in the best interests of the Society to move to "Xero" (a web-based accountancy package). He also explained why Kreston Reeves had been chosen to carry out the examination of the Society's accounts. The transition has been a smooth one so far, and the new package is both easy to understand and capable of producing many types of report quickly. The Treasurer also thanked Tom Snow and Andy Stringer, our previous Examiners, for their work over many years in examining our accounts. The Treasurer confirmed that the Society is currently in a healthy position with net assets of £137,159.25, Gift Aid Income of £4,634.72 to date and current planned outgoings for approved projects of £12,676.34. The Treasurer also thanked current members who support the Charity by signing up to Gift Aid and all who pay their annual subscriptions by standing order. The Accounts were unanimously adopted at the meeting. (Proposer Chris Davis/ Seconder Mark Mallalieu)

- 6 RETIRING MEMBERS OF COUNCIL – Alan thanked Richard Black, Chris Lowmass and Graeme Lyons for their huge contribution to the Society.
- 7 ELECTION OF OFFICERS – The following Honorary Officers, being eligible without nomination, were re-elected; Alan Perry (President), Richard Cowser (Conservation Officer), Mark Mallalieu (Recorder), Ted Merrikin (Treasurer), Dr Peter Plant (Sussex Bird Report Editor), and Robert Yarham (Press and Publicity).
- 8 ELECTION OF MEMBERS OF COUNCIL – The following members of Council, being eligible without nomination, were re-elected; Mya Bambrick, Jonathan Cook, Jonathan Curson and Mike Russell.
- 9 Following the approval of the amendment to Society Rule 9(b) (iii) above, it was unanimously agreed to re-appoint Chris Davis as Secretary and Anthony Holden as Newsletter Editor, until such time as a suitable replacement can be found. In response to a question from Audrey Wende, it was noted that a candidate for replacement of Anthony Holden appears to have been found but a date of transition has not yet been agreed. (Proposer Brian Osborne/ Secunder Rob Yarham).
- 10 Matt Twydell, nominated by Richard Black and seconded by Chris Davis, was then elected as Surveys and Projects Officer. (Proposer Richard Black/ Secunder Chris Davis)
- 11 Following the approval of the amendment to Society Rule 14 above, the appointment of Kreston Reeves as Examiners of the 2020 Accounts, was unanimously approved for the Society.
- 12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS – There being no other business relating to AGM matters, the meeting was closed at 15:20.



Fulmars - Jane Smith Wildlife Art

Rye Harbour Tern colony-Ted Merrikin

