



The following is a summary by Officers and members with specific responsibilities, setting out the Society's achievements during 2021 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 during the year were carried out in accordance with government restrictions implemented in the Covid-19 pandemic.

## SUSSEX ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

### COUNCIL

The Society is managed and run by a member elected Council who are also Trustees of the Society. The current members of Council are as follows:- Alan Perry (President), Mike Russell (Chairman), Alan Swetman (Secretary), Ted Merrikin (Treasurer), David Campbell (Recorder), Matt Twydell (Surveys & Projects Officer), Richard Cowser (Conservation Officer), Mark Mallalieu (Bird Report Editor), Martin Daniel (Newsletter Editor), Mya Bambrick (Council Member), Jonathan Cook (Council Member) and Jon Curson (Council Member).

### COMMITTEES

The work of Council is hugely supported by the work of various committees and sub-committees. Membership of these as at 31 December 2021 was as follows:-

Scientific Committee Mark Mallalieu (Chairman), Clare Buckle (Secretary), Dave Boddington, David Campbell, Richard Cowser, Dr Helen Crabtree, Dr John Newnham, Matt Twydell, Dr Ken Smith.

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

Bird Report Mark Mallalieu (Editor), Graham Hughes (Asst. Editor), Clare Buckle (Asst. Editor), Chris Barfield, David Campbell, Joanne Chattaway, Paul James, Dr John Newnham, Laurence Pitcher, Dr Ken Smith.

Membership & Publicity Committee Val Bentley (Chairman), Chris Brown, Martin Daniel, Tim Squire, John Trowell, Audrey Wende, Dr Mark (DM) Wright.

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

To all those who have retired from Council and the Society's committees during 2021, our very sincere thanks for all your hard work and efforts.

## REPORT OF COUNCIL

### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Everyone hoped that the Covid-19 pandemic would have disappeared by the end of 2021 but sadly this wasn't the case, so the Society had to adapt and continue to carry out our work while many restrictions were still in place. Some lifting of restrictions meant that we were able to reinstate activities that were suspended so it was rewarding to be able to continue and complete surveys and to be able to offer guided walks for our members again.

Despite the restrictions the enthusiasm and knowledge of our officers and volunteers used the technology and devised new ways of delivering our work to help the birds of Sussex. Our membership rose by the end of the year thanks to largely an excellent set of zoom talks organised by Mark Mallalieu that attracted hundreds of viewers and helped raise the profile of the society. Also new members were encouraged to join by the offer of three Sussex Bird Reports. Tim Squire also organised an excellent conference again by zoom which was also very successful.

There were several changes in members of Council as many had reached the end of their term. Chris Davis stood down as secretary, but we were pleased that Alan Swetman offered his services as a replacement much to our relief. Peter Plant's term ended as Bird Report Editor and was replaced by Mark Mallalieu, a particularly smooth transition as the Report when published was of the usual extremely high quality that people have come to expect of the Society. David Campbell stepped up to replace Mark as Recorder while still retaining his role as the Swift Project Officer. Finally, Robert Yarham's term as Publicity Officer ended and a replacement has yet to found. The Society owes a huge debt of thanks to all these retiring members during their time in office.

Restrictions didn't mean that threats to our countryside and birds receded and our Conservation Team under the leadership of Richard Cowser continued to work tirelessly along with their Sussex conservation organisation partners to object to activities and development applications where birds and their habitats are threatened. A particular proposal that arose in 2021 is for a huge Center Parcs development in a designated AONB and on Ancient Woodland which has involved an enormous amount of time to prepare the case, along with our partners, to fight this very damaging proposal.

Our communication with members and the public continued to increase during the year through our Website, Twitter, and Facebook platforms, while Council embarked on a process as to how the organisation is going to reach and engage with the wider audiences in the future that will enable us to continue to grow our membership and remain the important society that we are in providing the basis for the conservation of our birds in Sussex.

Our success could not be achieved without the dedication, expertise, enthusiasm, and hard work of so many volunteers who help keep the Society working to the high standard we have always exhibited. The reports contained within illustrate how successful we have been and therefore I am very proud to present this Annual Report to our members.

*Mike Russell, Chairman*

## **TREASURER'S REPORT**

Sussex Ornithological Society once again had a financially positive year in 2021. Income from members' subscriptions, legacies, donations, and Gift Aid was £35,046. The Society is extremely grateful to members for all donations received, all monies given will be used to support conservation projects. 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 £7,817 for conservation projects of which £6,000 was pledged to the RSPB for their Tern project at Medmerry Chichester, which was the only major request received. However, £45,000 was paid during the year to grantees, these funds had been agreed in the accounts of last year. I have included in my report some of the work that was carried out this year by the RSPB and SWT.

Thank you to all members (circa 1100) who now renew their Society membership by standing order or direct credit. Recently I have taken over the role of Subscription officer replacing Adrian Podmore who did sterling work over the years. A big thank you Adrian for all the hard work that you have done.

The Society is about to launch its own online membership joining page on the website and to that end we want to update our data base to a system called Memberpress. For this to be successful we need as many members' email addresses as possible. If you have not yet registered your email with us just pop a line to me [treasurer.sos@gmail.com](mailto:treasurer.sos@gmail.com) and I will do the rest, thank you.

Please remember to inform me of any change in your tax status, whether you can or cannot gift aid to the charity.

Our new accountancy package XERO is proving to be a great success, Kreston Reeves carried out their first Independent Examination of the Society's accounts in the early part of the year, making sure that we were up to date with all the Charity Commission legislation.

**Updating you all on a few facts**-with this year's additions the Society has donated over £412,000 to deserving projects since 1972. Gift Aid is again well supported by members and donors, and we have to date claimed over £75,700 from HMRC. Despite Covid, the Bird Race continues to be successful, and the sum raised since 2002 stands at just over £33,800 including Gift Aid.

This year I have added to this report the Statement of Financial Activities and the Balance Sheet for the Society in a simplified format. For those of you that require greater detail the Trustees' Report and financial statement can be found on our website in addition to the Charity Commissions.

**Ted Merrikin, Treasurer**

## Sussex Ornithological Society

### Statement of financial activities for the year ended 31 December 2021

	Note	Unrestricted funds 2021 £	Restricted funds 2021 £	Total funds 2021 £	Total funds 2020 £
<b>Income from:</b>					
Donations and legacies(inc Gift Aid)	3	8,538	1,469	10,007	7,178
Charitable activities	4	637		637	3,678
Other trading activities	5	1,642		1,642	4,278
Investments	6	1,422		1,422	1,850
Membership subscriptions	7	21,779		21,779	22,378
<b>Total income</b>		<u>34,018</u>	<u>1,469</u>	<u>35,487</u>	<u>39,362</u>
<b>Expenditure on:</b>					
Raising funds	8				928
Charitable activities	10	28,969	1,106	30,075	70,977
<b>Total expenditure</b>		<u>28,969</u>	<u>1,106</u>	<u>30,075</u>	<u>71,905</u>
<b>Net movement of funds</b>		5,049	363	5,412	(32,543)
<b>Reconciliation of funds:</b>					
Total funds brought forward		82,287	123	82,410	114,954
Net movement of funds		5,049	363	5,412	(32,543)
<b>Total funds carried forward</b>		<u>87,336</u>	<u>486</u>	<u>87,822</u>	<u>82,410</u>

### Balance Sheet

As at 31 December 2021

	Note	2021 £	2020 £
<b>Current assets</b>			
Debtors	19	522	429
Cash at bank and in hand		<u>97,545</u>	<u>129,166</u>
		<u>98,067</u>	<u>129,595</u>
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	20	<u>(10,245)</u>	<u>(47,185)</u>
<b>Net current assets</b>		<u>87,822</u>	<u>82,410</u>
<b>Total assets less current liabilities</b>		<u>87,822</u>	<u>82,410</u>
<b>Net current assets</b>		<u>87,822</u>	<u>82,410</u>
<b>Charity funds</b>			
Restricted funds	22	486	124
Unrestricted funds	22	87,336	82,286
<b>Total funds</b>		<u>87,822</u>	<u>82,410</u>

## **SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE**

Due to the ongoing pandemic all Scientific Committee meetings in 2021 were conducted via Zoom video conferencing.

At the April meeting Mark Mallalieu was re-elected as Chair of the Scientific Committee and David Campbell was welcomed as Recorder taking over from Mark Mallalieu whose term ended at the 2021 AGM. The committee expressed gratitude to Mark for the excellent work he has done in this role and appreciation for his taking up a new role as Editor of the Sussex Bird Report. Mark took over from Dr Peter Plant whose term as Editor also ended at the AGM. The Committee are grateful to Peter for his great work as Editor over the past five years.

The Sussex Fieldworkers meeting was again unable to take place, it is very much hoped that a face-to-face meeting may be possible in 2022.

Throughout the year the Committee maintained oversight of the Society's important work on records, the database, surveys, conservation and archiving, these are reported on in more detail below.

### **Clare Buckle - Secretary to Scientific Committee**

#### **Note by chair of the Scientific Committee**

Clare Buckle will stand down as Secretary to the Scientific Committee in April 2022 after serving since 2013, and in the first two of those years she was also Surveys and Projects Officer as the roles were combined until 2015. The Society is immensely grateful to Clare for this long period of support and for the skill and dedication with which she carried out the work. The Society is very fortunate that Joanne Chattaway has agreed to take over as Secretary to the Scientific Committee from April 2022.

### **Mark Mallalieu**

#### **THE SUSSEX BIRD REPORT**

The 2020 Sussex Bird Report was published and delivered to members in late October 2021. I am most grateful to the previous editor, Peter Plant, for his guidance.

The 272-page report consisted of the systematic list covering the 262 species recorded during 2020, plus Escapes and Introductions, augmented with maps, tables, graphs and photographs. There were papers on the first ten years of the Sussex Winter Bird Survey, White Storks breeding on the Knepp Castle estate, Cattle Egrets breeding in Sussex for the first time, Common Terns and Black-headed Gulls nesting on a factory roof in Chichester, and a note on movements in Sussex in 2020 of White-tailed Eagles from the Isle of Wight reintroduction project.

The report also included the Review of the Year, BTO Breeding Birds Survey results, the Ringing Report, updated First & Last Migrant Dates, the Wealden Heaths Breeding Bird Survey table and Finders Accounts for Notable Species in 2020 (Common Nighthawk and Bearded Vulture).

The drafting and production of the report involved a team of about 50 people, consisting of species account writers, proof-readers, assistant editors, the writers of the various papers and articles and the contribution of many superb photographs. As ever, essential preparatory work involved making comprehensive 2020 data easily accessible, a task completed ahead of the usual schedule.

The society is extremely fortunate to have a large and dedicated team involved in the production of the report and as editor I would like to thank them all. Special mention must go to the other members of the Editorial Team and proof-readers: Chris Barfield, Clare Buckle, Joanne Chattaway, David Campbell (Honorary Recorder), the late John Hobson, Graham Hughes, Paul James, Simon Linington, Owen Mitchell, Dr John Newnham, Laurence Pitcher and Dr Ken Smith.

**Mark Mallalieu - Bird Report Editor**

**CONSERVATION**

This was a significant year for conservation planning in Sussex. The Environment Bill finally became law and the government's planning algorithm appears to have bitten the dust – although Government will still demand that more houses be built in our county. We are lucky that large parts of Sussex enjoy protection from most development – the South Downs National Park and the Chichester Harbour and High Weald AONB's, plus those conservation areas that have statutory protection, but this just means that all Sussex's development must be compressed into the remainder of the county.

The impact of development was felt in Chichester Harbour when Natural England rated its condition as 'unfavourable declining', primarily due to sewerage overflows and agricultural run-off. The former led Chichester DC going to OFWAT to ensure that when Southern Water respond to development plans, they advise whether they would exacerbate sewerage discharge problems. (Sewerage discharge, unfortunately, is not an issue confined solely to Chichester Harbour). In September another water problem emerged when Natural England identified that the condition of the Arun Valley RAMSAR/SPA site was suffering because of over extraction of ground water. This led to an immediate ban on permissions for further development in much of Chichester, Horsham and Crawley Councils, which rely on water extracted from a bore hole near Pulborough, until designs for water-neutral development come forward – i.e., developments that will not increase the overall demand for water. The final Horsham Local Plan expected in 2021, has had to be delayed whilst it is reworked to reflect the requirement for water neutrality.

During the year we provided comments in seven public consultations relating to Local Plans and associated matters: -

- Provided data and inputs to Chichester's proposed amendment to their Strategic Wildlife Corridors as we seek to thereby protect some lakes that are important for birds.
- Commented on the Worthing Reg 19 (final) Local Plan – and we also spoke at its public examination at the end of the year.
- Attended the virtual public examination of the Brighton and Hove Council City Plan Part 2, obtaining clarity on the actions needed to protect Swifts when their major nesting site at the General Hospital is redeveloped.
- Commented on the Crawley Reg 19 (final) Local Plan.
- Commented on Lewes' Issue and Options consultation (a pre-Local Plan consultation) and on
- Wealden's Direction of Travel consultation (another pre-Local Plan consultation)
- and on Hastings Reg 18 (draft) Local Plan.

We also objected to proposals for a second runway at Gatwick Airport, because of the resulting additional housing and industrial development that would be required, the necessity for which is reflected in none of the current Local Plans.

We objected to the Rampion 2 Offshore Windfarm Preliminary Environmental Input Report (PEIR), as we felt that the offshore impact and displacement impact assessments on birds were inadequate. We also expressed concern that the cable coming ashore at Climping could damage habitat at this important site for birds and expressed concern at the proposed cable route across Henfield Brooks and of the impact on Nightingales of the siting of the substation that would connect the on-shore cable to the national grid. The Sussex Barn Owl Group also identified 25 Barn Owl nest boxes that might be affected. David Howey made a substantial contribution to our response and attended meetings of the Ecology Liaison Groups.

During the year we commented on 15 planning applications as well as providing Chichester Harbour Conservancy with comments on planning applications of interest to them. The planning application to build on a Brent Goose foraging site close to Pagham Harbour rumbles on and we produced a report entitled 'P/140/16/OUT – evidence that the current mitigation proposals will not work' based on three winters of recording birds on the proposed mitigation site and photographing how waterlogged it is in winter and how this inhibits crop growth. Jim Weston and some colleagues carried out the recording and we are very grateful for their efforts. Not far away Medmerry Holiday village, next to the Stilt Pools at RSPB Medmerry, has been sold so we expect new plans to be submitted for its redevelopment which we will watch carefully. We also provided comments and advice to several individuals concerned about planning matters and contacted Natural England expressing concerns about the impact that a falconer flying his bird was having on birds in the SSSI at Beachy Head.

We have worked with the Sussex Local Wildlife Sites Initiative (LWS) during the year and have continued to provide them with data and input to LWS reports and citations that they are updating and that have bird interest. That has included recommending an extension to one coastal LWS to include adjacent woodland that is good for birds. The Sussex LWS initiative is still updating existing LWS's and does not yet have the capacity to consider new sites.

We also encouraged The Conservators and Martin Jeffree (Ashdown Forest Bird Group) to carry out more comprehensive bird surveys on the Forest than in recent years and it was good to see that encouraging numbers of Nightjar and Dartford Warbler were found in their 2021 surveys. These are the two designated species in the Special Protection Area for Birds (SPA) citation that gives Ashdown Forest its conservation protection, so it is important that we know their numbers continue to remain healthy.

I am a member of the Cuckmere and Pevensey Catchment Partnership and Secretary of the Combe Valley Subgroup. The latter are looking at ways to make the Combe Valley Countryside Park a better place for wildlife, including birds, and a number of projects are being formulated. I am also a member of the Lower Adur Subgroup (a subgroup of the Ouse and Adur catchment Partnership) and am primarily helping SDOS in trying to reduce the excessive disturbance caused by much increased waterborne recreational activities at RSPB's Adur Reserve at Shoreham-on-Sea.

During the year SOS, SWT, CPRE Sussex and RSPB have continued to liaise on planning matters. The Woodland Trust have joined us and we now call ourselves the Sussex Partnership for Nature. We liaise monthly and have held meetings with Wealden, Chichester, and Arun Councils to discuss planning policy matters. We have also combined to oppose Centre Parcs' plans to build a new holiday village at Oldhouse Warren beside the M23. Their chosen site is on ancient woodland and is in the High



Weald AONB, both of which designations are supposed to protect it from development. It is also a good site for birds. To date our campaign has got off to a good start with publicity in the national press and on Radio 4, as well as coverage in Sussex media. We would like to persuade Centre Parcs to find another site which is not so ecologically sensitive. Constructing a large holiday park in an area of ancient woodland is not, an act of ecological responsibility.

I am grateful for the support we have received during the year from colleagues in the Sussex Partnership for Nature. I am also very grateful to Anthony Holden who has helped me throughout the year and to Dr John Newnham who has helped with data extraction. During the year we have contacted a number of members of the Society about specific local queries and our thanks go to them for their responses – which have often added so much more than our records alone can tell us.

We feel that having a database of nearly 7 million records and so much local knowledge is enabling the SOS to make a real contribution to protecting some of Sussex's nature.

**Richard Cowser - Conservation Officer.**

### **CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT**

The Society continues to have management responsibility for the following two sites:

#### **Charleston Reedbed**

The restrictions due to Covid-19 meant a slow start to any conservation work being done in the reedbed in 2021. Through the efforts of a member of the ringing group some willow coppicing was done and the walkway was extensively repaired. There could not be any work parties from the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) volunteers in the early months.

Then it was the breeding season which prevented any further management work.

A plan was drawn up in autumn as to which were the most important tasks to tackle for the benefit of the Reserve bearing in mind there was a huge backlog of work outstanding from the result of Covid-19 restrictions and flooding over the past two years.

In November work was able to begin in earnest with a welcome return of the SDNPA volunteers who were clearly very happy to be able to visit the site again. They, together with members of the ringing group cleared an extensive area of Blackthorn which was then burnt on site. Other visits to cut back the ever-increasing bramble patches and to coppice willow were made during November & December. There is still a lot of catching up to do but at least very little flooding occurred at this time.

A grass snake was seen in the autumn which was a good sign that general wildlife is beginning to make a slow comeback to the site.

Again, a big thank you to the ringing group for doing what was possible in these trying times and of course immense gratitude to Richard Brown, the landowner, for allowing the SOS to manage the site.

**Tim Parmenter**

#### **New Lake**

Lockdowns and other priorities have prevented my visiting New Lake during the past year but there have been reports of some fishing activities and a meeting with the site's management is needed to ensure that such activities are not to the detriment of the nature reserve. Bird highlights were that 59 pairs of Cormorant were recorded nesting during the year. We have also commented on a planning

application on land to the south of the Nature Reserve, expressing concern that this could open up the land on the east bank to public access.

**Richard Cowser - Conservation Officer**

**Database**

During the year the society added almost 919,000 records to its database an increase of almost 27% on the activity in 2020.

More details of the breakdown of the 520,000 records for 2020 are contained in the 73<sup>rd</sup> Sussex Bird Report. This shows over 90% of records came from online recording. The majority of these came from the BTO's BirdTrack recording system but an increasing number of records came from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology 'eBird' system. By end of January more than 430,000 records for 2021 had been received.

The 2020 records and recently acquired historic records, less WeBS, BBS, GBW, those marked confidential and those the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre (SxBRC) had already received directly, were copied into the SxBRC in September.

Records supplied to the Society via the eBird system have not previously been shared with any other bodies, importantly the SxBRC, for conservation purposes. During 2021 negotiations were successfully concluded allowing eBird records to be channelled through SOS to the SxBRC.

The Society's multi-user online database CoBRA2 (C2) continues to function very well. During 2021 the record extraction module was used on 2190 occasions by 37 users on 319 days of the year, and the Account Writers module was accessed on 830 occasions by 38 different users on 133 different dates.

Despite the extensive automated record checking programmed into the database, there was still much work to be done by the Database Manager (Dr John Newnham) and Recorder (David Campbell) 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 any problems encountered. Council continues to be extremely grateful to John for his ongoing work on database matters and to Chris and Andy for the continuing support with CoBRA2.

**Clare Buckle - Secretary to Scientific Committee**

**Records**

This summary relates to bird observations made in 2020 due to the time required to process and analyse a year's records and to maintain continuity with previous Recorder's reports. 262 species were recorded in Sussex in 2020 two fewer than 2019 but matching 2018. A total of 193 submissions for sightings of rare birds at a county or national level were handled, including ten British Birds Rarities Committee species: Common Nighthawk, Pallid Swift (released in Sussex and not included in our records), Kentish Plover, Bearded Vulture (accepted onto Category E), Pallid Harrier, Hume's Warbler, Great Reed Warbler, Savi's Warbler, Tawny Pipit and Siberian/Stejneger's Stonechat.

As usual data was gathered for a submission to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel and a report on bird recording in Sussex was published in the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre's ADAstra report. The SOS also contributed to the scarce migrant's report to be published in British Birds.

Fieldwork and recreational birding were compromised, especially in spring, by the Covid-19 pandemic and this did affect the information gathered on rare breeding birds. For instance, work on Stone-curlews was limited, though this species is thought to have attempted to breed at three sites. Also notable was the total of at least 37 pairs of Goshawk reaffirming this species now established presence in the interior of Sussex, while Honey-buzzards also held strong with 7 pairs breeding. The Knepp Estate recorded 23 Turtle Dove territories, though this may now represent nearly a third of the Sussex population. Cattle Egrets attempted to breed at three sites.

I took over from Mark Mallalieu as Hon. Recorder in May 2021. Mark provided detailed and easy to understand guidance without which I would probably have struggled to get the hang of the role.

The SOSRC worked excellently, including the invaluable support of the Assistant Recorder, Martin Orchard-Webb. The relatively few paper records we now receive still require considerable work to digitise, so the three volunteers who input such information continued to provide hugely appreciated assistance. Database Manager, Dr John Newnham, also provided vital support.

### *David Campbell - Hon. Recorder*

#### Surveys

In 2021 Matt Twydell re-organised the Marsh Tit survey that had to be postponed in Spring 2020 due to Covid-19 lockdown. The survey protocol used playback to find birds setting up territory. The 2021 survey repeated some of the sixty-five 1km squares that were randomly selected across the entire county in 2020 as well as adding further 1km squares. Due to further lockdown restrictions in 2021 some sites had to be randomly selected within a ten km radius of volunteers. Nevertheless 45 squares were surveyed in 2021. The full results will be published in the 2021 Sussex Bird Report.

Mark Mallalieu organised a survey of Honey buzzards over 2020-21. The survey was completed with good but not complete coverage. It confirmed the importance of the county for the breeding population of this species within the UK.

A national Turtle Dove survey was carried out in 2021 run jointly by the RSPB and BTO. The survey area was selected 1km squares with the aim of covering all potentially suitable habitat in the square. The 1km squares were selected following a stratified sample approach with the top stratum being squares with recent records (2015-20). The data was entered online on the Turtle Dove websites, and we are now currently awaiting the results of the survey from RSPB and BTO.

Following a request from Forestry England a survey of breeding Nightingales and Turtle Doves in Chiddingfold Forest was planned in 2020 but carried out in 2021. 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.

Across the Sussex sites (Birchfield Copse, Kingspark Wood, Ashpark Wood & Hog Wood) 15 Nightingales and three Turtle Doves were recorded. On the Surrey sites (27 sites surveyed by Surrey BC) 15 Nightingales and one Turtle Dove were recorded. The county results for each society will be written up in their own bird reports with reference to both counties in the discussion.

The Ashdown Forest Bird Group organised a survey of Dartford Warblers and Nightjars on Ashdown Forest in 2021. The results of the Dartford Warbler survey will be published in a paper in the 2021 Sussex Bird Report.

The Urban Gull survey continued in 2021 across the county, taking in the Bognor area, Telscombe Cliffs, Eastbourne, Polegate, Rye as well as other areas. Across the three seasons the survey has run,

around 135 1km squares have been surveyed in East & West Sussex. Joint National Conservation Committee (JNCC) have produced a report with population estimates for Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gulls based on 2020 surveys. This will be updated with the extra surveys that were done this year and will be added to the final Seabirds Count report in due course.

The following long term annual surveys continued to be carried out in 2021 (survey co-ordinator's name in brackets):

- a) **The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), (Dr Helen Crabtree)** – 176 1km squares were surveyed this year by volunteers. Most results were submitted online. Population trends for 1994 – 2020 have been provided by the BTO and results and trend tables for 40 species have been prepared for the 2021 Sussex Bird Report.
- b) **Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS), (Dr Helen Crabtree and Dave Boddington)** – Most of the main sites in Sussex were covered in 2020/2021.
- c) **Co-ordinated Seawatch records** for 2020 were summarised in the Sussex Bird Report by Dr John Newnham. Seawatching records for 2021 are still being collected.
- d) **The 2021 Heronries Census (Dr Helen Crabtree)** – Counts were completed at 34 sites in 2021 and eight of these contained Little Egrets while one contained Cattle Egrets. Additionally, three inland Cormorant colonies were monitored one of which contained Little Egrets.
- e) **The Wealden Heaths Breeding Birds Survey (Alan Perry)** – covered 12 heathland sites in 2021. Of the five priority species (Nightjar, Woodlark, Tree Pipit, Stonechat and Dartford Warbler), Nightjar and Dartford Warbler showed a slight increase over 2020, Woodlark and Tree Pipit a slight decrease while Stonechat was stable from 2020. Woodcock and Redstart both showed an increase from 2020.
- f) **Waterways Breeding Surveys (WBBS), (Dr Helen Crabtree)** – two surveys were carried out.
- g) **The Sussex Winter Bird Survey (SWBS), (Christine George)** – completed for its tenth year over winter 2020/2021. Covid-19 restrictions impacted the survey a little but despite this 153 1km squares received at least one survey, which is the second highest ever and 114 species were found by 97 volunteers. A full report of findings from the first ten years of SWBS has been published in the 2020 Sussex Bird Report.
- h) **Woodcock Survey** – 16 squares were surveyed in Sussex for this annual survey.

Looking forward, the Society will be carrying out a Nightingale Survey in 2022 (during April and May). Volunteers are being sought for this survey.

As always, a huge number of volunteers were involved in all these activities and the Society is very 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 Barn Owl Study Group 2021 activities and outcomes**

**Barn Owls** fared well in Sussex in 2021 particularly regarding brood sizes encountered, where we found an average of 3.2 here in Sussex, marginally better than the 2.9 nationwide average (source: Barn Owl Trust). Chicks ringed were mostly of higher weight than the previous year indicating high prey availability and successful fledging.

Adversely, a high number of boxes, historically occupied, housed no, or just single adults. Over 200 box visits were made of which 58 were occupied by Barn Owls resulting in Sussex Barn Owl Study Group (SBOSG) volunteers ringing a total of 191 Barn Owls, 181 chicks and ten adults. Jackdaw, Stock

Dove, Tawny Owl (which is uncommon in a Barn Owl box) and Mandarin Duck occupied 44 boxes we visited.

Engaging interested parties is a strong part of SBOSG ethos and in 2021 we embarked on three projects involving the installation of a further 43 boxes. These projects will also include providing landowner management advice and Barn Owl education open days.

Landowners and invited visitors actively attend our ringing sessions and we welcome anyone interested joining us when and where possible. Worthy of a mention is that during the Covid-19 impacted 2021, which thwarted a planned visit, an enthusiastic landowner 'streamed' a video of birds being ringed to a local school.

Thank you to Sussex Ornithological Society, from the group, for the valuable funding used for boxes.

### **Terry Hallahan**

#### **Swift conservation in Sussex in 2021**

It was a good year for Swift conservation action in Sussex, with local groups more able to meet, discuss and get things done than during 2020. As well as dedicated Swift conservation groups, general 'green' or 'rewilding' groups centred on a town, and established during the pandemic, have naturally tended to develop an interest in Swifts. This works well for sharing the Swift message and seeing meaningful action.

This year I met with local groups Billigreen (Billingshurst), Green Havens (Newhaven) and Wild Wadhurst to offer advice and representatives from the local Sussex Wildlife Trust group in Storrington. All these groups have either started erecting boxes or are in the process of planning to do this.

We have been keeping a close eye on planned developments at Brighton General Hospital, the town's biggest Swift colony. It is still very early days, but it is likely that most of the buildings will be demolished and replaced. The situation will continue to be monitored and we will give our input at the appropriate stage.

Lewes Swift Supporters continue to lead the way when it comes to active Swift groups in Sussex, showcasing a robust survey protocol, installing 64 new boxes in 2021 and meticulously logging 76 apparently occupied nests. In Warnham, five nests were logged at Goose Green, and in the village a new box was installed, with five other positions earmarked for box installation in spring 2022.

Swift boxes were installed, with a playback system at Ashburnham Place near Battle, and boxes were installed a year behind schedule (due to the pandemic) on the main building of the Chichester Festival Theatre. In Henfield, ten boxes had young.

Notable media coverage I was involved in included an interview on BBC Radio Sussex for Swift Awareness Day, and a piece which was published in both the Worthing Herald and the West Sussex County Times.

### **David Campbell - Swift Champion**

#### **MEMBERSHIP & PUBLICITY COMMITTEE**

The membership & Publicity Committee discussed matters by email until Covid-19 restrictions were eased in July 2021 and subsequently held two face to face meetings in July and October. As well as the responsibilities obvious from its title, the Committee looks after Conference, which was 'virtual' in 2021, Newsletter, New Year Bird Race, the website and social media (Twitter & Facebook). Also, in

2021 the judging of the 2020 Photo Competition took place and the winners announced. Unfortunately, for the second year running this year, the evening meeting for volunteers, known as the President's Evening, was unable to take place.

The Committee was indebted to Mark Mallalieu for setting up a series of online talks following the Conference. These were delivered by various speakers including David Campbell, Matt Eade, Dr Mark

Eaton, Steve Egerton-Read, Dr Sam Franks, Jim Glover, Mike Russell, and Marcus Ward; he also gave two of the talks himself! This enabled the Society to reach out to a wider audience than just the existing membership; several new members joined as a result and other attendees also gave donations. Mark also set up a Society YouTube channel on which the recordings of the conference

and the series of talks were available to those unable to take part at the time. We also thank the Sussex Wildlife Trust for facilitating these online events.

### **Society Awards**

As no face-to-face Conference was possible in 2021 it was agreed that the Awards should not be made this year.

### **New Year Bird Race**

The Covid 19 restrictions in place from Boxing Day 2020 meant that the usual New Year Bird Race action would not have been in line with government guidance restricting travel and face to face contact, and so the race became a New Year Species Challenge. It was excellent that many members decided to take up the challenge, either on an individual or 'team of two' basis, to count as many species as they could on a single day on a local walk. Some who have never participated in one of the Races were thus able to join in. It was astonishing that 15-day lists were sent in and 119 species seen – only 16 fewer than in the full-blown Race in 2020, when teams were trying to maximise their count by dashing all over the county. Of course, the number of species possible was rather dependent on location – living near one of the coastal hotspots was a major advantage, though the highest total, 71, came from the Arun Valley. Only nine species were seen by everyone and 23 were exclusive to just one person or couple. The proceedings, from sponsorship and generous donations by individuals, resulted in £1,592 being raised for bird conservation projects in the county.

### **Photographic Competition**

The year 2020 saw the launch of a SOS Photographic Competition which was open to anyone residing and photographing birds in Sussex. The winners were announced at the 2021 AGM which was held online, and prizes duly awarded. The winner of the overall category was Bob Brewer with a wonderful shot of two young Peregrine Falcons battling in mid-air. Winner of the Young Photographer category was ten-year-old Florence Garland for a photo of White Storks at their nests at Knepp. The three runners-up were Simon Watkins, Bob Brewer and Adam Huttley. Philip Winter's portfolio was awarded with a special mention and Richard Allan and Ian Redman were also commended. Many of the photographs were showcased in newsletters, social media and in the 2020 Sussex Bird Report. The Society thanks members and others for their support for this competition.

### **Press and Publicity**

The Committee were sorry to say farewell to Rob Yarham at the 2021 AGM. Rob had been looking after the Society's publicity for the past five years, taking the social media aspect to a new level particularly with the Facebook and Twitter accounts. Council wished to review his role and an immediate replacement was not made but Rob kindly agreed to continue his involvement in the short

term. Four media releases were issued to the press, TV and radio media contacts during the year to promote the Society's announcements and activities as well as sponsored conservation projects. Mya Bambrick has continued to be very active in managing the Twitter account, which appears in a prominent panel on the SOS website, and the Twitter page now has 3,159 followers, a fifth more than at the end of 2020. Mya reports that there was a lot of engagement for the #SaveOldhouseWarren campaign with many people interacting with the tweet she put out at the end of November. This year SOS was also tagged in many more tweets of people's sightings and photos of Sussex birds. Mya used Twitter to advertise the Conference and the subsequent online talks arranged by Mark Mallalieu; these also helped to raise the Society's profile more widely. At the end of 2021, the SOS Facebook page had accumulated 1,386 followers and 1,202 likes, with the posts featuring the 2021 Conference and the Zoom talks generating a lot of interest, including more likes and followers. 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](https://www.facebook.com/ornitholosussex).

### **Val Bentley - Chair M & P Committee**

#### **Conference**

The 2021 virtual conference took place over the weekend of 30 & 31 January and was a great success, very well attended and received much praise. There were 248 attendees on the first night and 143 on the second.

On Saturday evening Dr Sam Franks from the BTO gave a very informative and eye-opening account of the crisis which is the rapid decline in Curlew numbers in the UK. This was followed by a fascinating illustrated presentation by Simon and Niki from Inglorious Bustards about the spectacular annual migration which takes place over the Straits of Gibraltar.

SOS council member Mya Bambrick kicked off Sunday's proceedings with an interesting session about the Cameron Bespolka Trust and the evening concluded with Nadia Shaikh from the RSPB talking about the challenges that are faced by people from ethnic minority groups in the world of conservation.

### **Tim Squire – Conference Organiser**

#### **Archives**

The electronic archive has continued to be updated on a regular basis this year. Once again the main additions have been copies of the minutes of the Society's committee meetings, particularly those of Council and the Scientific Committee together with the relevant supporting documents.

The older paper archive (before 2004) continues to be looked after by the County Archivist in the Chichester Record Office where documents can be viewed by prior arrangement with the County Archivist. The Archive office did have a backlog of cataloguing the old paper SOS records but this has now been brought up to date.

### **Mark (CMV) Wright – Archivist**

#### **Newsletter**

Covid-19 had a continuing, if at times indirect, impact on the newsletter in 2021. Delays occurred as a result of factors including production problems. Some of the regular features in the newsletter were affected by the difficulties caused by the need to respond rapidly to government guidance as the pandemic evolved.

Despite these difficulties the quality of articles and photographs submitted by contributors remained at a high level. In addition to the existing band of stalwart contributors it was heartening to see several members coming forward to offer articles or images – but more are always welcome!!

While no editor ever gets as much feedback as they would like, those comments that were received were overwhelmingly positive – a tribute to all the people who contributed their time, energy, and abilities to creating and distributing the newsletter. Thanks are due to Matt Eade, who ended his stint as a contributor of always readable recent reports. The editor must also thank his predecessor, Anthony Holden, for his tremendous support in keeping the newsletter on the road.

### *Martin Daniel – Newsletter Editor*

#### Website

Several new features were added to the website during the year, including: -

- A new section – *Leave a Gift in Your Will* – was created. This explained how a legacy could be left to the society and gave examples of how such a gift might be used for its conservation work. Richard Cowser provided the copy for these new pages.
- In 2020 we investigated how we might enable new members to join the society online, ie via the website. In November 2021 work was recommenced on this project and I'm pleased to report that this new feature will be live on the site early in 2022.

Finally, as always, thanks go to the Sightings Team, led by Paul James, for their work in maintaining the Sightings page throughout the year.

### *Chris Brown - Webmaster*

#### Membership

This has been, without a doubt, by far the busiest year I can recall since I took on this job! In a couple of months during this year I was receiving applications for membership virtually every day. Overall, we gained 163 new members (actually one or two of those were rejoining after leaving us a year or two ago) but sadly 14 members passed away during the year and 77 didn't renew their subscriptions. It is though very pleasing to report a net gain during 2021 of 73 members. We closed 2020 with 1935 members but at the end of 2021 this had increased to 2008.

The offer of effectively receiving three Sussex Bird Reports for a single year's subscription, first offered at the end of 2020, has attracted many of these new members, particularly from 1 November – from which date a subscription runs through until December of the following year. The other factor, from which membership numbers benefited, was the online events which were well publicised and open to all, i.e., the superb online Conference arranged by Tim Squire and series of virtual talks set up by Mark Mallalieu. These were open for non-members to attend, and the benefits of membership were publicised at the end of these events. Looking ahead we are now very close to introducing an electronic website option for new members, this should go live in early 2022.

### *John Trowell - Membership Secretary*

#### Outings

Covid - 19 restrictions collapsed the 2021 outings programme from 24 to nine outings. The first outing was the Seaford Seawatch (2 May) which under restrictions was arranged as two socially distanced groups of six. A normal programme was resumed at the end of August when I had the pleasure of leading the Whitbread Hollow walk where 15 members were able to join me. Subsequent outings



were held at Whitbread Hollow, Arlington Reservoir, Cissbury Ring, Selsey/Church Norton, The Burgh and Dungeness. Unsurprisingly attendance was lower than in the previous years with only the Whitbread Hollow and Arlington Reservoir outings reaching double figures (14 and 15 respectively). As we move into 2022, we have a full programme of field trips scheduled and hopefully circumstances will allow a return to pre 2020 attendance.

*Mark Wright - Outings Organiser*



Sussex Barn Owl Study Group

**Minutes of the Fifty-ninth ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the members of the SUSSEX ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY held by Online Zoom Meeting due to the COVID-19 pandemic on Friday 7 May 2021 at 7:00 p.m.**

PRESENT: 27 Members attending by Zoom were welcomed by President Alan Perry, with a further 42 Members having contributed postal or email voting slips. Those members attending who contributed postal or email votes were ineligible to vote again at the AGM.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were received from Martin Daniel. We apologised 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. Please note that if website issues that were beyond our control today, resulted in any members who would have liked to make a late registration to attend, encountering difficulties in doing so, then we would also like to apologise to them.

2 THE MINUTES OF THE 58<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING were unanimously approved as a true and accurate reflection of that meeting. (Proposer Brian Osborne/Seconder Mark Mallalieu)

3 The TRUSTEES REPORT for the year ended 31 December 2020 as approved by Council on 16 February 2021 was presented by Mike Russell, Chair of Council, and adopted by the meeting. Mike reminded us of how, despite it being an unusually challenging year, SOS has been able to conduct a wide range of activities albeit sometimes in a slightly different format. Peter Plant was thanked for another excellent Bird Report, his last one as editor; John Newnham continues to do a phenomenal job managing the Records Database, Richard Cowser's Conservation Team have been making a positive conservation impact through their scrutiny of local planning applications and engagement wherever impact on birds is anticipated, and Matt Twydell has ensured that surveys have continued under government permitted guidelines. SOS membership numbers are increasing again, and it is remarkable how well as an organisation, we have adapted. With the continued use of Zoom online meeting technology, Council and our committees have continued to meet and discuss business on a regular basis. (Proposer Rob Yarham/Seconder Jon Curson).

4 The Treasurer presented the FINANCIAL STATEMENT for the year ended 31 December 2020 as approved by Council on 16 February 2021 and adopted by the meeting. The Treasurer explained how he now feels more at ease with the support of a professional accountancy body (Kreston Reeves) to examine the Society's accounts and ensure compliance with Charity Commission requirements. The Treasurer confirmed that the Society is currently in a healthy position with net assets of approximately £139,000, and current planned outgoings for approved projects of £36,500. This leaves £102,000 available for supporting bird conservation projects, which under the Society's reserves policy means there is £33,000 available to spend this year if suitable projects are found. This will include a very recent RSPB application for an exciting development proposal at Paghams Ferry Field. It was impressive to note that the lockdown adapted Bird Race was still able to raise £1,340 with £252 raised in Gift Aid,

and that Gift Aid has in total raised £4,500 for the Society from this year alone. Grants made by the Society since 1972 for projects suiting its aims and objectives are a staggering £426,842. (Proposer Brian Osborne/Seconder Joanne Chattaway).

5 RETIRING MEMBERS OF COUNCIL – Alan thanked Chris Davis, Anthony Holden and Peter Plant for their huge contribution to the Society. Mark Mallalieu was thanked for his exceptional contribution as Recorder, and we look forward to his continuing to support the Society in the role of Bird Report Editor. We are also extremely grateful to the work of Rob Yarham who will continue in the role of Press & Publicity for a few more months. However, we will urgently be looking for a replacement for him and would welcome any interest in what has become an ever more crucial role in the Society.

6 ELECTION OF OFFICERS – The following Honorary Officers, being eligible without nomination, were re-elected: Alan Perry (President), Richard Cowser (Conservation Officer), Ted Merrikin (Treasurer), Robert Yarham (Press & Publicity) and Matt Twydell (Surveys & Projects Officer). (Proposer Brian Osborne/Seconder John Newnham)

7 ELECTION OF MEMBERS OF COUNCIL – The following members of Council, being eligible without nomination, were re-elected: Mya Bambrick, Jonathan Cook, Jon Curson and Mike Russell. (Proposer Bob Edgar/Seconder Peter Plant).

8 David Campbell, nominated by Mark Mallalieu and seconded by Richard Cowser, was elected as recorder.

9 Martin Daniel, nominated by Mark Mallalieu and seconded by Val Bentley, was elected as Newsletter Editor.

10 Mark Mallalieu, nominated by Richard Cowser and seconded by Mike Russell, was elected as Bird Report Editor.

11 Alan Swetman, nominated by Chris Davis and seconded by Barrie Puttock, was elected as Secretary.

12 The appointment of Kreston Reeves as Examiners of the 2021 Accounts, was unanimous approved for the Society. (Proposer Val Bentley/Seconder Mike Russell).

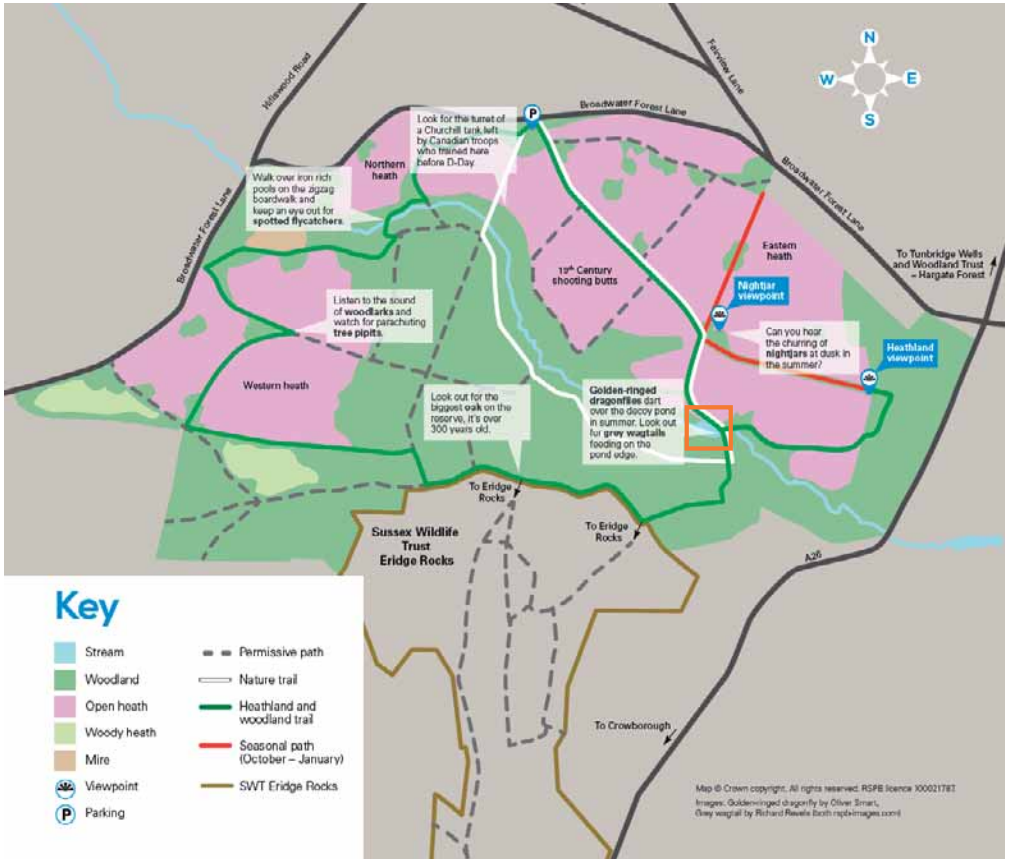
#### ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It has been a sad and difficult year for many families, and SOS are particularly sad to have lost both David Lang and Tim Calloway, two wonderful wildlife conservationists who will be greatly missed.

There being no other business relating to AGM matters, the meeting was closed at 19:30.

## Water for Wildlife: pond restoration at Broadwater Warren

Map and images to support the RSPB's application to the Sussex Ornithological Society, August 2020



Map showing the main areas of Broadwater Warren, including the pond (orange square) which straddles the border of heathland and woodland. The pond is just 0.9km from the reserve car park, 1.5km from other access points and is on both the green and white walking trail, making it an easily accessible focal point for our 4,000 annual users, not to mention a wildlife haven.





Photos A and B show the large leak in the pond adjacent to the bridge. The wood bundles we have been using to stem the flow can be seen, however the drop in water level (Photo C) is dramatic and a long-term solution is urgently needed.



The pond provides a vital food source for birds via the invertebrates that emerge from it including kingfishers, herons, grey wagtails and hobbies.

With full water levels last summer, the pond was a haven for freshwater wildlife. We are confident we can restore the pond to its former glory once the leak has been repaired.

## Water for Wildlife at Broadwater Warren

- Following the continued generous support of the Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS), we are delighted to provide an update on our project to restore and enhance the wildlife pond at Broadwater Warren nature reserve. The works have now all been completed by our contractor, Pagan Plant Ltd, and we are delighted with the result. The leak in the pond has been fully repaired and an outflow pipe and spillway have been installed to ensure that, during heavy rains, excess water can flow out of the pond in a controlled way without causing future leaks. During the heavy rains we experienced last month the spillway has already been used and demonstrated what a simple solution it is to control water levels in the pond. We are delighted to welcome back our weekly volunteer work parties this autumn who will be re-instating the head hedge to avoid dogs entering the pond. Materials for this will come from coppicing work they will be carrying out around the pond. Once this has been completed will be able to re-open the footpath around the pond so that visitors can enjoy wildlife-watching there once again.



An outflow pipe has been installed to ensure excess water can run out of the pond in a controlled way.



The installation of a spillway has future proofed the pond and will prevent a breach of the banks even in very heavy rains. We are extremely grateful to SOS for their support of the project, without which we wouldn't have been able to bring a contractor on site to install a robust long term solution to water level management. The installation of a spillway has futureproofed the pond and will prevent a breach even in heavy rains.

Thanks to a generous grant of £21,985, SOS are supporting a project led by the Sussex Wildlife Trust together with the RSPB to enable habitat enhancements at Amberley Wildbrooks which will support populations of breeding waders.

### **Topping**

Over late summer and autumn we are able to top fields. This has improved these fields for lapwing, and wintering wildfowl.



### **Tussock sedge control**

The extra tussock sedge spraying was carried out and although in many locations the dead plants are still standing, in time they are being trampled by cattle. Along with the flailing we have done, these areas are becoming more suitable for breeding waders and wildfowl (see first picture of field 20). It also allows improved grazing by allowing grazing up to ditch edges (safer as ditches are not hidden by vegetation). Both dead and alive tussocks do provide good invertebrate habitat as well as breeding areas for Grasshopper Warblers, so we would not wish to eradicate them completely.







Mink Rafts have been installed in ditches, but no prints have been discovered to date.

Ditching following the scrub clearance along the ditches we were able clear some that had not been done for many years. These along with future management will improve access for both management and the public footpath.

We do not have the complete results from the invertebrate survey yet because samples are still being processed.

The highlights to date:

- *Cerceris quinquefasciata* (Five-banded weevil wasp) which is new to West Sussex.
- One of the surprises was the quality of the Wood for saproxylic beetles, as it had Hornet Longhorn Beetle *Leptura aurulenta* which is Nationally Scarce. It is one of very few national locations for two Nationally Rare ground beetles *Demetrias monostigma* and *Philorhizus sigma*. The former is associated with the Greater Tussock Sedge, and the latter marshes, fens, and wet edges.
- Also, not found on the surveys, but Norfolk Hawker has been recorded near Amberley Swamp this year, which is just starting to arrive in Sussex, this record being the first for the reserve network.

This highlights the importance of managing the reserves to maintain a mix of habitats, as well as for target species.

Joe Bassett, RSPB Warden, comments that the work funded by SOS is already paying dividends. There have been a good number of wintering wildfowl and raptors. The number of Lapwing attempting to breed in the managed areas has increased by 2 pairs. Sadly deer pressure is still impacting on the fledgling success.

Jane Willmott. Reserves Manager.