

Charity number: 256936



The following is a summary by Officers and Members with specific responsibilities, setting out the Society's achievements during 2023 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>

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:- **Chris Corrigan** (President), **Clare Buckle** (Chair), **Alan Swetman** (Secretary), **Ted Merrikin** (Treasurer), **Mark Mallalieu** (Chair of Scientific Committee), **Jonno Cook** (Chair of Membership & Publicity Committee), **Mya Bambrick** (Council Member), **Susan Kerry Bedell** (Council Member), **Tony Benton** (Council Member), **Jon Curson** (Council Member), **Elsa Heath** (Council Member), **Katie Nethercoat** (Council Member), **Pat Wilder** (Council Member).

Committees

The work of Council is hugely supported by the work of the various committees and sub-committees.

Membership of these on 31 December 2023 were as follows: -

Scientific Committee Mark Mallalieu (Chair), Joanne Chattaway (Secretary), Dave Boddington, Dr Helen Crabtree, Alison Giacomelli, Pete Hughes, Gareth James, Dr John Newnham, Dr Ken Smith, David Thorns.

Bird Report Mark Mallalieu (Editor), Chris Barfield, Joanne Chattaway, Graham Hughes (Asst. Editor), Paul James, Simon Linington, Owen Mitchell, Dr John Newnham, Laurence Pitcher, Dr Ken Smith.

Records Committee David Thorns (Recorder), Bola Akinola, Chris Ball, Derek Barber, Brian Cox, Gareth James, Paul James, Matt Phelps, Laurence Pitcher.

Membership & Publicity Committee Jonno Cook (Chair), Val Bentley, Chris Brown, Chris Davis, David Porter, Thalia Griffiths, Audrey Wende, Pat Wilder, 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 2023, our very sincere thanks for all your hard work and efforts.

REPORT OF COUNCIL

CHAIR'S REPORT

2023 began with another successful new year bird race, which raised almost £1,500 for the Society. Then at the end of January we were delighted to hold our first in person conference since 2020 with 150 members attending an excellent day at a new venue, Oathall Community College. At the end of the conference Stonechat awards for long service to the Society were given to Chris Davis, David Howey, and Conservation Officer Richard Cowser.

We were very sad when both David and Richard died the following month and in June the Society lost another key figure when Dr Barrie Watson, Vice President, and a member of the Society from day one, also passed away. Members of the Society were able to read some lovely tributes to them in the spring, summer, and autumn newsletters.

At the AGM in April, the Society's new rules were approved by members, with 52 attending the meeting at the Adastra Hall in Hassocks. Mike Russell stood down as Chair following the completion of his five-year term of office and Matt Twydell and Martin Daniels also left Council as outside commitments took them away from Sussex. We are very grateful to them for their contribution to the Society.

The new rules made changes to those positions that automatically sit on Council which now consists of just five specific positions of Chair of Council, Treasurer, Secretary, and the Chairs of both the Scientific and the Membership and Publicity committees. In addition, we can have between five to eight others who are 'ordinary' members of Council. With three such members being re-elected (Jon Curson, Mya Bambridge and Katie Nethercoat), Elsa Heath and Tony Benton were voted in as additional ordinary Council members bringing the total number of trustees following the AGM to ten.

The new rules are the result of a great deal of work behind the scenes and we are extremely grateful to Richard Cowser and Mark Mallalieu for driving this forward, and to Nick Rutter for his legal advice. Nick had indicated that he intended to step aside as the Society's Legal Advisor once the new rules were in place. Council would like to thank Nick for his work on behalf of the Society over the years. We are fortunate that during the year Andrew Armitage volunteered to take Nick's place as the Society's Legal Advisor.

Following AGM business, those present were treated to a fascinating talk by Penny Green, Ecologist at the Knepp Estate.

A key focus for Council this year has been ensuring that risk is well managed. If the number of trustees were to fall below the minimum of ten, Council's ability to manage the Society's affairs would be severely restricted. We therefore co-opted both Pat Wilder and Susan Kerry Bedell to Council during the year, and now have 12 trustees. Other risk management activities included updating our risk register and putting in place regular monitoring and reviews, we refreshed the Society's Strategy, reviewed our insurance provision, and put in place secure cloud storage for the Society's documents. We are now working on a programme of updated risk assessments for our activities.

In May we joined the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) which provides advice and best practice guidance to voluntary organisations and charities. As a result of this we introduced new policies including Volunteering, Equality Diversity & Inclusion (EDI), Health & Safety and Safeguarding policies. The new volunteering and EDI policies allow us to advertise volunteer vacancies on platforms that were previously unavailable to us, and this has already proved fruitful.

In September a very successful Membership Strategy Day was held at the Pavilion in Lewes, organised by Jonno Cook - chair of our Membership and Publicity committee, and facilitated by Sue Walsh. The focus of the day was to think creatively about ways we can increase our membership and maximise our impact in support of our objectives. Our new Health & Safety and Safeguarding policies, as well as being best practice for charities, put us in a good position for the ambitions we have for extending our activities to a wider membership, and working with other like-minded organisations.

It has been another successful year for the Society, as a direct result of the dedication, passion, and hard work of those who help keep the Society running to a high standard and sincere thanks are owed to everyone who has supported the Society this year.

Clare Buckle – Chair of Council

TREASURER'S REPORT

Sussex Ornithological Society once again had a financially positive year in 2023. Income from members' subscriptions, legacies, donations, and gift aid was £76,883. 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 us in their wills.

During the year, the Society donated a total of £31,342 for conservation projects. £20,100 was pledged to Sussex Wildlife Trust for the no fencing cattle grazing project at Waltham Brooks and the Heathlands restoration projects at Iping and Stedham Commons, Burton Mill Pond, Graffham Common and Old Lodge. A further £5,770 was donated to RSPB Broadwater Warren for the expansion of the Goat Grazing project on the reserve. Swifts and Barn Owl projects were granted combined over £2,600 for the year.

2023 saw many more of you joining or renewing your membership of the Society via our website, this is of great importance to us as it regularises our database information that we hold. For those of you that still favour payment by cheques that is fine, just send them to me Ted Merrikin, Blessings, Barns Farm Lane, Storrington, West Sussex RH20 4AH.

Our accountants Kreston Reeves have completed the examination of the Society's accounts for 2023 and I have included the Statement of Financial Activities and Balance sheet in a simplified format. Greater detail of the Trustees' Report and financial statement can be found on our website in addition to that of the Charity Commissions.

Since 1972 the Society has donated over £466,000 to deserving projects, so a huge thank you for all your support over the decades. I would urge you to register with us for Gift Aid if you are a taxpayer as it makes a massive difference to our income being able to claim back an extra 25% on top of your membership and donations that you give to the Society. Gift Aid is worth £1.3 billion to the Charity Sector, but every year more than £500 million goes unclaimed. To date we have been able to claim a massive amount back from HMRC, more than £86.5 thousand pounds, thank you so much. Please watch this short clip https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kslfeu_C3MM

The annual Bird Race remains a very popular event at the beginning of each year, although the number of entrants was reduced during the pandemic it has regained momentum. Since 2002 the sum raised by participating teams has risen to more than £36,000 including gift aid.

Ted Merrikin – Treasurer

Sussex Ornithological Society

Statement of financial activities
for the year ended 31 December 2023

		Unrestricted funds 2023	Designated funds 2023	Restricted funds 2023	Total funds 2023	Total funds 2022
	Note	£	£	£	£	£
Income from:						
Donations, legacies and Gift Aid	3	47,450	-	-	47,450	11,132
Charitable activities	4	2,453	-	-	2,453	816
Other trading activities	5	2,229	-	-	2,229	1,988
Investments	6	4,268	-	-	4,268	1,379
Membership subscriptions	7	20,485	-	-	20,485	23,917
Total income		76,884	-	-	76,884	39,232
Expenditure on:						
Raising funds	8	266	-	-	266	864
Charitable activities	10	61,044	-	455	61,499	49,567
Depreciation on Society's equipment	24	310	-	-	310	-
Total expenditure		61,620	-	455	62,075	50,431
Net movement of funds		15,264	-	(455)	14,809	(11,199)
Reconciliation of funds:						
Total funds brought forward		66,169	9,999	455	76,623	87,822
Net movement of funds		15,264		(455)	14,809	(11,199)
Transfer between funds		2,917	(2,917)	-	-	-
Total funds carried forward		84,350	7,082	-	91,432	76,623

Balance Sheet

As at 31 December 2023

	Note	2023 £	2022 £
Fixed Assets			
Equipment owned by the Society	19	1,600	-
Current assets			
Debtors	20	3,509	1,330
Cash at bank and in hand		133,231	104,038
		<u>136,740</u>	<u>105,368</u>
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	21	<u>(46,908)</u>	<u>(28,745)</u>
Net current assets		<u>91,432</u>	<u>76,623</u>
Total assets less current liabilities		<u>91,432</u>	<u>76,623</u>
Net current assets		<u>91,432</u>	<u>76,623</u>
Charity funds			
Restricted funds	22	-	455
Designated funds	22	7,082	9,999
Unrestricted funds	22	84,350	66,169
Total funds		<u>91,432</u>	<u>76,623</u>

The financial statements were approved and authorised for issue by the Trustees on 10/03/2024 and signed on their behalf by:



Clare Buckle
Chair of Council

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

There were five Scientific Committee meetings in 2023, three held via Zoom video conferencing and two in person. It is with great sadness that we lost Richard Cowser in February, a long serving and very valuable member of the Scientific Committee. However, the Conservation team continued its activities, often drawing on work that Richard had carried out. Pete Hughes, the new Surveys and Projects Officer, was welcomed at the April meeting and Mark Mallalieu was re-elected as Chair at the June meeting. David Thorns, the new Recorder was welcomed onto the Committee at the August meeting. Two more new members were appointed this year: Alison Giacomelli and Gareth James joined in October. Members of the Committee have made valuable contributions to the Society's work, including on records, the database, surveys, conservation, the Sussex Bird Report, and archiving, which are reported below.

Joanne Chattaway – Secretary to Scientific Committee

THE SUSSEX BIRD REPORT

The 2022 Sussex Bird Report was published and delivered to members in November 2023. The 296-page report contains the systematic list covering the 268 species recorded during 2022, plus Escapes and Introductions, enriched with maps, tables, graphs, photographs, and artwork. There were excellent papers on the 2022 Common Nightingale survey; BTO/RSPB Breeding waders of wet meadows 2021-2022; Meadow Pipit roosts on Ashdown Forest; Trends in priority species on Wealden Heaths from 1998 to 2022; and Long-term trends at Beachy Head of flycatchers, redstarts, chats, and related species. The report also included the explanatory Introduction to the Classified Records, the Review of the Year, BTO Breeding Bird Survey results, Sussex Winter Bird Survey results, the Ringing Report, updated First & Last Migrant Dates, the Wealden Heaths Breeding Bird Survey table, and Finders' accounts for notable species in 2022 (American Robin, Brown Booby and Penduline Tits).

The drafting and production of the report again involved about 50 people, consisting of species account writers, proof-readers, assistant editor, the writers of the various papers and articles and the contribution of many superb photographs and pieces of artwork. As ever, essential preparatory work involved making comprehensive 2022 data accessible, with guidance for account writers and proof-readers. My thanks to everyone involved, including my hard-working colleagues in the Editorial Team.

Our printers again did an excellent and speedy job of printing and arranging distribution of the report. My thanks to Mike Dawson and his team at Swallowtail Print Ltd.

Mark Mallalieu – Bird Report Editor

CONSERVATION

In an endeavour to manage the massive amount of work undertaken by Richard Cowser, since his sad passing the task of addressing planning issues has been split on a district basis between several members. The team kept abreast of national policy, legislation and other issues affecting birds, including the updated National Planning Policy Framework, onshore wind-farm policy, and Biodiversity Net Gain legislation. We tracked local authority plans and commented on those and several planning applications, working in close partnership with The Sussex Wildlife Trust, the RSPB, the Woodland Trust, and the Council for the Preservation of Rural England. There was fortunately a decrease in the number of planning applications needing a response in support of birds and bird

habitat during the last year compared to recent years, but looking ahead the Society will need to carefully examine major new housing developments in the pipeline, including in the Ansty and Hamsey areas.

We participated in earlier consultations on updates to local plans in Horsham and Mid-Sussex Districts and both these councils will be consulting on final versions of their new plans early in 2024 prior to submission to the Secretary of State. We also commented on the final draft version of the Crawley Borough Council Local Plan. Specific development proposals on which we engaged include the following.

Center Parcs, Oldhouse Warren

Following a long campaign in which the Society was very active, the applicant withdrew the proposal, and we understand that the owners are now considering ways of better managing the area for wildlife.

Rampion 2

The Rampion 2 formal planning application has now been submitted to the Government. The Society has not registered as an interested party in this consultation but is supporting the Sussex Wildlife Trust in its endeavours to ameliorate the impact of this development. The Society's previous efforts to influence plans in the lead up to this point have borne some fruit in several positive changes to the planned route, although we still have some concerns about this and the offshore plans.

Bewl Water

After coordinated action by concerned organisations, including a submission by the Society regarding the importance of the site to roosting gulls and the case for SSSI and Ramsar status, plans submitted for camping and holiday lodge developments have been turned down although we understand further appeals and plans to develop the facilities may still be on the horizon.

Drayton Gravel Pits

Alongside the SWT, we engaged with Chichester District Council over our concerns about modifications to the proposed Strategic Wildlife Corridors on the east side of Chichester in the vicinity of the Drayton House gravel pits. These changes were included in the final plan submission without the opportunity for us or SWT to consider and object. We await the outcome of our further objections.

Normanhurst Estate

The Greystokes Developments application for a 224- lodge holiday village on the Normanhurst Estate in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty was rejected by Rother District Planning Department. This was another success for the Society and other conservation bodies' efforts.

Pagham Village

An attempt to remove the condition to consent for a 350-home development, requiring mitigation for feeding Brent Geese, was rejected following considerable effort by local members monitoring the site. The Society kept the relevant planning department informed of the failure of the mitigation and worked closely with Natural England to ensure that their instruction to the Council was to ensure working mitigation was in place prior to construction commencing.

Medmerry Holiday Park

The owners of the Caravan Park close to the Stilt Pools at Medmerry RSPB reserve are seeking to refurbish and expand. We have objected to the proposals because of the significant risk for both breeding birds and wintering waterfowl and waders.

Conservation Team: Terry Allen, Anthony Holden, and Pat Wilder

CHARLESTON REEDBED

Habitat management efforts at the reedbed have often been hampered by seasonal flooding and this year was no different. The first task of the year with the South Downs volunteers had to be cancelled due to the floods. After a clear up of the site, (it's amazing how far the boardwalk planks can swim when not nailed down!) the ringing group set about tackling some blackthorn in a drier & woodier part of the site.

We exposed a couple of mature apple trees and opened the ground below; this could have brilliant migrant thrush potential in the winter months.

In February the weather dried up and we were finally able to get the South Downs volunteers in for a day of bramble bashing. They helped to clear a good amount of the bank around the pond and later in the year the benefits of this were obvious, the reedbed that once battled for position against the bramble was much more abundant and though will never be dense enough to be nesting habitat for Reed and Sedge Warblers, has no doubt increased plant and insect biodiversity in this part of the reedbed, an excellent source of food for the birds.

There is plenty of willow on the site which must be cut on a constant rotation, a few areas were pollarded this year. Although most work must pause for the nesting season, some summer tasks were carried out: board walk repairs and the annual orange Himalayan balsam pull which we hit hard each year so as not to allow it to spread any further. The blackthorn patches that were cut earlier in the year had the regrowth trimmed to stunt them and give the reed more light to re-establish.

We had planned to have the volunteers from the Society and the National Park return for two separate tasks in November but again it had to be cancelled due to flooding, hopefully this can be completed soon weather permitting.

Natasha Stonestreet

DATABASE

At the end of 2023 the society's database of records held 7,349,232 records from nearly 3800 sites within Sussex. This large collection of records has been provided by 10,851 observers. During 2023 over 641,000 records were added to the database, 94% involved observations for 2022 and 2023 but 36,630 were from earlier years including 1308 predating the formation of the society. Like previous years records have been labelled as coming from over 50 sources; those providing more than 10,000 records were the BTO's Birdtrack (49.1%), Cornell University eBird (28.3%), BTO's Garden Bird Watch (2.6%), BTO's Wetland Bird Survey (2.4%), Horsham District Council Reserves (2.1%) and iRecord (1.7%). The 2023 dataset will not be completed until later in the year but more details about the 2022 records were published in the 75th Sussex Bird Report.

In September over 500,000 records, comprising most of 2022 records and recently added historic observations, were shared with the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre. These observations then became readily available for use by local authorities, conservationists, and researchers. The Society's

multi-user online database CoBRA2 (C2) continued to be used extensively and regularly during the year. The record extraction module was used on 1623 occasions on 304 different days by 34 users. The Account Writers module, which includes considerable analysis of the records, was accessed less frequently with most use, as expected, during the Sussex Bird Report writing and editing process. This module of the database was interrogated on 614 occasions by 31 users on 93 different dates.

Maintenance of the database requires considerable effort from both the database team (Dr John Newnham, Alex Glossop, dealing with eBird records, and Jan ten Sythoff working with iRecord data) and the Recorders (David Campbell and David Thorns). During the year 256 batches of records, varying between 102,349 and a single record, were processed and uploaded on 108 different dates. Over 50,000 duplicate records were introduced into the database from eBird which needed to be found and removed. Furthermore, despite the extensive automated record checking programmed into the system there was still much work to be done by the bird report, database and recording teams to contact observers about potential erroneous records.

The database continues to function very well and required little change during the year although in the autumn the hosting package was upgraded hopefully providing more processing power. Once again Chris Brown, the Society's Webmaster, and his colleague Andy Lawrence have continued to be very responsive on the few occasions there is an issue. The Society continues to be extremely grateful to Chris and Andy for the continuing work maintaining CoBRA2 and to Alex and Jan for their valuable help.

Dr John Newnham – Database Manager

RECORDS

This summary relates to bird observations made in 2022 due to the time required to process and analyse a year's records, and to maintain continuity with previous Recorder's reports. 268 species were recorded in Sussex in 2022, ten more than the previous year.

In keeping with previous years data was collected and sent to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel for their report published in British Birds. Similarly records of species considered to be scarce migrants nationally were gathered and sent to British Birds for their annual report. A summary of the notable records in 2022 was sent to the Sussex Biodiversity Centre to be included in the ADASTRA report. It was a notable year for breeding Honey-buzzards with ten confirmed breeding pairs and five non-breeding pairs. In addition, between 25 and 35 other adults were found in suitable habitat during the breeding season which bodes well for the future. The outlook is also bright for Goshawks in Sussex with an apparently increasing breeding population - there may now be in excess of 60 pairs of this impressive raptor which is, in some parts of the county at least, the most frequently encountered bird of prey after Common Buzzard.

It was a positive year for Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers with breeding confirmed in five tetrads, probable in six and possible in a further five. However, on a less positive note, the fortunes of Wood Warbler and Grasshopper Warbler in the county show no signs of improving - once again there was no confirmed breeding, and the former is now considered a very scarce passage migrant in Sussex.

A total of 143 submissions for sightings of rare birds in the county were handled throughout the year. These were prepared by David Campbell (County Recorder in 2022) and sent for circulation to the Society's Rarities Committee for approval. The committee worked through batches of these records in a timely and efficient manner, aided greatly by the support of Martin Orchard-Webb (Assistant

Recorder in 2022) and Dr John Newnham (Database Manager), both of whose assistance and expertise was invaluable and greatly appreciated.

In addition to these records, the following 15 submissions were sent to the British Birds Rarities Committee for ratification at a national level: American Robin, Ashy-headed Wagtail, Black Stork (2), Bonaparte's Gull, Booted Warbler, Brown Booby, Caspian Tern, Desert Wheatear, Hume's Warbler, Kentish Plover, Pallid Swift, Sardinian Warbler, Squacco Heron, White-spotted Bluethroat.

David Thorns – Recorder

SURVEYS

The Society's survey strategy was updated in November 2023 and published on the Society's website. In 2023 the Society organised a breeding Nightjar survey. The survey protocol followed the methodology from the previous survey in 2004. 110 1km squares were allocated to volunteers to cover, some of which were already being covered by the Wealden Heaths Breeding Bird Survey. The full results will be published in the 2023 Sussex Bird Report.

The following long-term annual surveys continued to be carried out in 2023 (survey coordinator's name in brackets): - The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), (Dr Helen Crabtree), 191 1km squares were surveyed this year by volunteers, an increase of 7 on previous year.

- Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS), (Dr Helen Crabtree and Dave Boddington): Most of the main sites in Sussex were covered in 2022/2023.

- Co-ordinated sea watching records for 2022 were summarised in the Sussex Bird Report by Dr John Newnham. Sea watching records for 2023 are still being collected.

- The 2023 Heronries Census (Dr Helen Crabtree) Counts were completed at 42 sites in 2023.

- The Wealden Heaths Breeding Bird Survey – West Sussex (Alan Perry) covered 12 heathland sites in 2023. The five priority species surveyed were Nightjar, Woodlark, Tree Pipit, Stonechat and Dartford Warbler.

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

- In winter 2022/23 the Sussex Winter Bird Survey (SWBS) (Christine George) was completed for its twelfth year. 96 individual volunteers were involved with 151 1km squares receiving at least one visit, and 134 squares getting 2 visits. 122 different species were recorded.

During the winters of 2023/24 and 24/25 there will also be a BTO winter gull survey (WinGS), coordinated by WeBS local organisers.

In 2024 the Society will be carrying out a county-wide breeding Corn Bunting survey.

The Society is very grateful for the efforts of all those who have contributed so much time and effort to all the surveys across the county.

Pete Hughes – Surveys Officer

SUSSEX BARN OWL STUDY GROUP (SBOSG)

Barn Owls in Sussex, 2023 outcome. 189 boxes were visited by SBOSG of which 81 were occupied by Barn Owls (40.7%), our highest occupancy percentage since measuring 'like for like' visits during the past four years.

Four boxes contained single roosting Owls (two male, two female), whilst 77 produced successful breeding pairs. One of these broods subsequently failed due to the death of the adult female. 232 chicks were ringed with a mean average brood size of 3.01, so for three consecutive years we see Sussex producing another solid average brood size above the reported national typical.

An excellent effort from the team with 22 adults trapped in boxes post hatching period, this was, by far our largest annual total number of adults caught, ringed and processed.

A fabulous control: A pullus ringed by the Salisbury plain raptor group was caught in a box in East Sussex, a non-breeding female aged Euring code five. (2nd calendar year). A 157km movement!

Unfortunately, some Barn Owl ringing outcomes undertaken in Sussex are not reported to me, so the figures represent only the SBOSG activities, which have been measured 'like for like' over a four-year period to ascertain the peaks and troughs of our Sussex Barn Owl population, which is slowly increasing.

Eight existing Barn Owl boxes were repaired or replaced; 16 new boxes were installed in suitable locations. Other owl activities included installation of 11 Little Owl boxes and six Tawny Owl boxes.

Thanks again to the Society for funding some of these boxes and to observers for reporting all Owl sightings.

Terry Hallahan

SWIFTS

Swifts appear to have benefited from a reasonably good breeding season, without the extreme heat of the previous year, but also from a relatively wet summer, at least compared to 2022. These weather conditions were thought to have benefitted invertebrates, which in turn help influence successful Swift breeding.

The number of local Swift groups across the county continues to flourish, with both small villages and larger urban centres featuring. Still at the forefront of these groups is the Lewes Swift Supporters group, which identified 83 active nests during 2023. They have now installed 144 Swift boxes since 2020, and although few of these are being used by Swifts now, House Sparrows are taking up residence in the absence of Swifts. Thus, some birdlife is benefitting from the boxes.

Advice has been offered to several groups and individuals, regarding the suitability and placement of Swift boxes. These have included a church tower, a cemetery chapel, as well as more conventional buildings.

Many of the local Swift groups have also focused on providing habitat to encourage invertebrates, including wildflower meadows and roadside verges; additional tree planting and the provision of ponds has been encouraged to increase biodiversity.

It is hoped that these measures will benefit not just Swifts but all wildlife.

Dave Boddington – Swift Champion

SWALLOWS & MARTINS

I have had several inquiries from around Sussex asking for advice to help with declining or absent House Martins and Swallows. A church in Horsham was provisioned with Swift boxes and House Martin nest cups because of a member inquiry.

I am currently working with the Green Team in Arundel town to deliver a large project provisioning private and public buildings with Swift, Swallow and House Martin boxes, including a House Martin tower. This will also include survey training during summer 2024.

I have also been scoping the village of Clymping for the suitability of Swift nest box and House Martin nest cup provision at various properties including the school.

The colony of House Martins at my house had another good year, expanding for the sixth consecutive year. The weather wasn't good enough for any third broods, however a total of 31 nest cups were occupied with a peak of 27 pairs. A minimum count of 90 chicks were counted at and/or leaving the nests.

Paul Stevens - Hirundine Champion

MEMBERSHIP & PUBLICITY COMMITTEE

CHAIR'S REPORT

I would like to thank the Society's Membership and Publicity (M&P) team members for their wonderful contributions of making 2023 another successful year. It has been great to welcome new members to the team including Pat Wilder (Publicity), David Porter (Conference Organiser), Thalia Griffiths (Newsletter Editor), Benjamin Orna-Ornstein (some social media) and Caroline Ward (Online Events Organiser) to their roles and thank Martin Daniels, who edited our Newsletter for many years until our Summer 2023 edition, for his efforts. The vital contributions that these people have made and Val Bentley, Chris Davis, Audrey Wende, Mark Wright, Chris Brown, Mya Bambrick and our many walk leaders have made is essential to delivering this success.

Considerable focus has been invested in finding new channels to fill volunteering vacancies in M&P and Scientific and success has been driven through promoting opportunities online through various volunteering boards. This has resulted in the recruitment of several talented people to our mission. The traditional ways of appealing for volunteers within our membership and via the Society's website was leaving vital gaps which had been vacant for too long. Our membership database has been improved during the year, but still needs to be streamlined. We now have better reporting functionality but need to make some small investments in enabling a single reference point.

M&P held a key strategy day in September where we looked at several opportunities to help The Society to grow and still be relevant in years to come. We have an ageing membership and that is a threat to our future. Several initiatives have commenced to help address this. Our ability to connect with our membership efficiently in a digital manner is hampered by a lack of up-to-date email addresses for many of our members. Efforts will be made to improve this in future, whilst complying with GDPR.

There have been some gaps in some of the Society's policies which reduced our ability to recruit volunteers from certain audiences (the county's universities and some local volunteering boards). There were also some policies which needed review and to enable us to be compliant as a charity and reduce our risk. We have not made 'an industry' over these documents but taken a pragmatic 'light

touch' approach covering volunteering, health, and safety (including risk assessments), equal opportunities and children/vulnerable adults.

We held three online webinars in the dark evenings of February and March. These are a legacy of the pandemic but were successful in reaching new audiences with over 100 in the virtual room at each event. The theme of these were 'Birding on a budget – financial and carbon' by Sara Humphrey, 'Sussex rarities' by Matt Eade and 'Raptor persecution and its impact' by Jenny Shelton. All these have been uploaded onto the Society's YouTube channel if you missed them.

Jonathan (Jonno) Cook – Chair of M & P Committee

NEW YEAR BIRD RACE

A total of 17 teams took part in 2023, with 53 different participants, plus one collie! The winning team was "Half the Rolling Turnstones" with 96 species. In second place were Mike's Mergansers with 92, while 2022 winners The Dynamic Duo came in third with 90. A combined total of 129 species were seen, 10 by all teams and 17 by only one. The seven teams who chose 2 January enjoyed a day of light winds and sunshine, but many of the others had to battle against wind and/or rain. We are extremely grateful to all those taking part, for their determination and for raising the amount of £1484.21 (including Gift Aid) for conservation purposes.

Val Bentley – Bird Race Organiser

PRESS & PUBLICITY

I was appointed in March to the post of Press Officer, which had been vacant for three years. Press Releases have included articles on the failure of the mitigation site for Brent Geese which would be displaced from a nearby proposed housing development in Pagham Harbour, the '21 Walks for Wildlife' by Council Member Mya Bambrick, the proposal for inclusion of Swift boxes in new developments and the recording of a Wren in Hastings as the 11 millionth record of the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre. I have also contacted journalists at the BBC and ITV following their interest in local bird news stories.

Pat Wilder – Press Officer

SOCIAL MEDIA

Our main social media platforms, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter), continued to grow in 2023. More followers are tagging us in their posts, increasing awareness of the Society to the wider birding community. X is now on 3,850 followers and Facebook has reached 1,600 followers, with 1,400 likes. Instagram remains our lesser-used platform, with 408 followers. We hope to develop this in 2024, to engage with younger demographics. The release of the 2022 bird report generated lots of excitement and attention on X, with many tweets being posted of its lovely front cover!

Mya Bambrick

CONFERENCE

January 2023 marked the return of an in-person SOS Annual Conference, after two years of "virtual" events. It was a pleasure for members to gather at Oathall Community College, Haywards Heath. The Conference was chaired by Adrian Thomas, and Chris Corrigan welcomed 150 members to the event.

The highlights of the event were the presentations by: -

- Ryan Burrell - Waders on the South Downs and the Norfolk Estate
- Dr Greg Conway - Nightjar migration and movements
- Dr Ken Smith - SOS Surveys
- Peter Hughes - Interventions for terns in Chichester Harbour
- Dr Henri Brocklebank - 60 Years of the SOS and the Sussex Wildlife Trust working together

As well as the more formal elements, Conference featured a wide range of sales and information tables around the venue. The raffle raised £415 for the Society. Jonathan ("Jonno") Cook coordinated the recording of several of the presentations, available on the Society's YouTube channel as always, kindest thanks to everyone who assisted - on the day and in advance - making this such a successful event. Following the 2023 event the Society now has a new Conference Organiser: David Porter, who joined the Society in August. David is a semi-retired Insurance Executive and has a wide range of interests and experience.

David Porter – Conference organiser

ARCHIVES

The main additions to the paper archive this year have been the birding notebooks of the late David Lang, which were kindly donated to the Society by his family, and the interesting nineteenth century bird book "Ornithological Rambles in Sussex" by Knox published in 1855. David Lang was a vet who lived in Lewes from 1965 and in Barcombe from 1994. The notebooks cover the period 1952-2014. These items along with the other pre 2004 paper archives are housed in the West Sussex County Record Office in Chichester where they can be seen by pre-arranged appointment with the County Archivist. Otherwise, the electronic archive has continued to be updated on a regular basis with the minutes of Council and other committee meetings together with the relevant supporting documents.

Mark (CMV) Wright - Archivist

NEWSLETTER

I took over as Newsletter Editor in August and have so far produced this year's Autumn and Winter issues. I'm very grateful to outgoing editor Martin Daniel for a detailed introductory briefing, and to Anthony Holden, Val Bentley, Audrey Wende and Richard Durn for their support as I've "learned the ropes".

I'm indebted to contributors who have sent a range of interesting articles to supplement the regular content, and to photographers who have submitted some magnificent images. Submissions of articles and images reflecting the Society's wide range of expertise are more welcome than ever as I settle into this role.

The Membership & Publicity Committee Strategy Day in September discussed whether the newsletter should have more colour photographs and articles from outside the organisation, and whether there might be appetite for an e-newsletter with more images and clickable links, rather than the present e-newsletter format which is a PDF file of the printed version. It's clear that a large proportion of the membership still prefers to receive a hard copy newsletter in the traditional format and no major design change seems likely in the short term. However, we continue to encourage members to switch

to an e-newsletter where possible, which saves the Society money, and we have streamlined the mailing system for hard copies.

We have switched to a new printer, Swallowtail Print, who already print the Sussex Bird Report, enabling Mags and Peter Whitcomb, who for many years put the newsletters into envelopes for posting, to enjoy a well-earned retirement from the task!

Thalia Griffiths – Newsletter editor

WEBSITE

2023 was a quiet year for the Society's website in that no new user-facing features were added during this time. However, behind the scenes, some changes were made to improve the site's performance. In the latter part of the year work was started on creating a digital version of the 2014 avifauna, The Birds of Sussex, which when complete will be available for view / download by the Society's members. Finally, as always thanks go to the Sightings Team, led by Paul James, for their diligence in keeping the Recent Sightings page up to date.

Chris Brown – Webmaster

MEMBERSHIP

There have been some big changes in the way membership is managed by the Society throughout 2023, and it has been a real team effort to move the membership database to a more robust and secure online electronic membership and payment system using a Sharepoint software platform. Fairly early in the process, it was realised by Jonathan Cook that some tidying up was needed to remove duplications, unattached joint members etc. Hence, although the final membership figures for 2023 do not appear to have changed significantly from the overall totals at the end of 2022, they do now provide a much more reliable total.

On December 31, 2023, the Society had 2067 members. This is comprised of 1,062 Individual Members, 808 Joint/Family members, 169 Life/Joint Life Members, 21 Student/Under 20 members and 7 Honorary Life members. 170 new members have been welcomed to the Society.

It has also been a sad year with the loss of some of our most dynamic members which led to the realisation that we needed to not only attract new members, but to do everything in our power to keep them active and engaged in the Society so that they want to remain long-term members and enjoy being part of the Society as much as we do. In September, we held a Membership Strategy Day which has led to new initiatives that we will be gradually implementing over the next year, including free membership for students and Under 20s to encourage an interest in birds and conservation at as early an age as possible, and new ways to influence more members to switch to receiving newsletters electronically. Printing & postage of Newsletters has cost the Society a massive £9,930 this year, which we hope members will agree is money that could be better put towards the good conservation causes identified by Council.

As mentioned above, it has been a real team effort this year, so thank you to the Treasurer and everyone in Membership and Publicity for the huge amount of work that continues to go into making us such an exciting organisation to be a part of.

Chris Davis – Membership Secretary

OUTINGS

The 2023 Outings Programme provided members with a selection of 25 outings (two more than 2022) throughout Sussex plus just across the border into Kent at Dungeness; one outing was cancelled namely Thorney Island as there was a clash with other public events causing traffic congestion in the Chichester area. The Programme of Events format was changed from the folded card of previous years, and this allowed more event information to be included than hitherto.

As always, the programme was planned to provide opportunities to encounter as many of the birds of Sussex as possible, both migrants, residents, and birds of passage. Although appalling weather reduced attendance at two popular outings (Rye Harbour and Selsey) to three, many had high single figures and moreover half attracted double figure turnouts. The best attended outings included: Medmerry; Dungeness; Arun Valley and the Burgh; Tidemills; Whitbread Hollow; Arlington; Cissbury Ring; Selsey with 28 turning out for the Selsey Seawatch, which again included the Ashdown Bird Group. Seawatches (and outings that included a seawatch) provided sightings of birds such as Arctic Skua; Gannet; Guillemot; Red-breasted Merganser; Red-throated Diver; Slavonian Grebe. Late afternoon winter walks or summer evening walks provided records of Short-eared and Barn Owls (Arun Valley & The Burgh) and Nightjar at both Lavington Common and Ashdown Forest.

Finally, it was pleasing to welcome new members, established members new to Outings, younger members, and potential new members on some of the 2023 Outings.

Mark Wright – Outings organiser

Sussex Ornithological Society

Registered Charity 256936 www.sos.org.uk

Minutes of the Sixty-first ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the SUSSEX ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY held at the Aadastra Hall, Hassocks on Saturday 1 April 2023 at 14:30.

1. **Welcome and Apologies For Absence:** Alan Perry took the Chair and welcomed 52 members to the 2023 AGM, Secretary confirmed that the meeting was quorate. Apologies were received from 11 members.
2. **The Minutes of the 60th Annual General Meeting held on 9 April 2022** were unanimously approved as a true and accurate record of that meeting. Proposed Jon Curson. Seconded Peter Plant.
3. **Approval of New Rules – the** proposed new rules had been circulated ahead of the meeting with the AGM agenda but Alan Swetman – Secretary gave a brief explanation of the need to rewrite the rules which were still largely in the original form and so 60 years old. The revised rules will allow more flexibility in recruiting people onto Council and into the key Society jobs, will ensure compliance with Charity Commission guidelines and ensure that as far as possible they are easier to understand. It was also explained that whilst the new rules were voted through at a remote Zoom EGM in January, we were not quorate and therefore the vote was null & void. There were no further questions from the floor. Proposed Mark Mallalieu. Seconded Peter Plant. New rules were approved with a unanimous vote in favour.
4. **Adoption of the Officials & Members report** – again this report had been circulated with the AGM agenda, but Alan Perry highlighted some specific points from the Chairs report: -
 - A welcome return to face-to-face meetings following Covid restrictions.

- Huge thanks to John Trowell who had stood down after an incredible 46 years as membership secretary in recognition of which John has now been made a Life Member of the Society.
- Huge thanks to Val Bentley who has stood down as Chair of the Membership & Publicity Committee after 19 years albeit Val is remaining on the committee. It was noted that the Society was lucky to have Jonno Cook who has taken over as Chair.
- Other notable events included: another first-class Bird Report for 2021, completion of the rule rewrite and major conservation success with the Center Parcs decision not to build a new holiday park on Ancient Woodland in Sussex.

Adoption of the report was proposed by Clare Buckle, seconded by Val Bentley, and adopted unanimously.

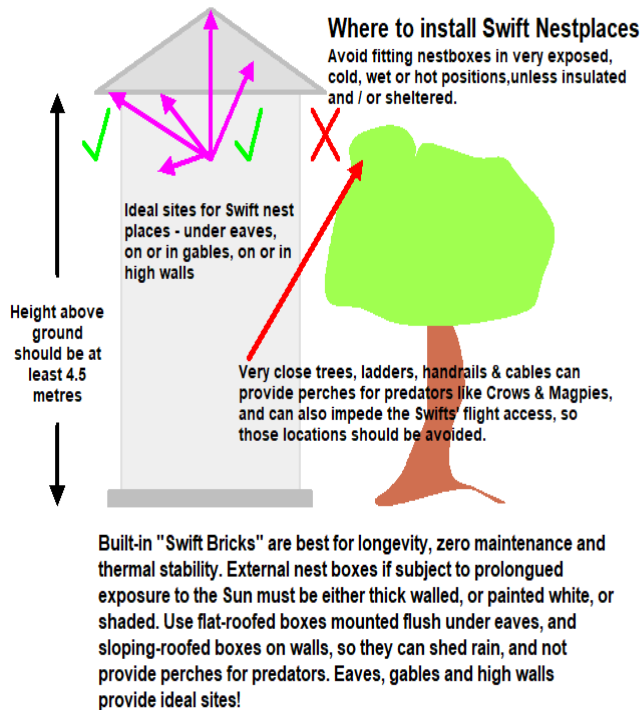
5. **Adoption of the Trustees & Financial Statement** – Ted Merrikin – Treasurer presented the report. In summary, income for the year to December 2022 was £39,232 (£35,487 – 2021), main components being Membership Subscriptions of £23,917 (£21,779 – 2021) and Donations, Legacies & Gift Aid of £11,132 (£9,757 – 2021). Expenditure totalled £50,431 (£30,487 – 2021), increase principally accounted for by Grants of £25,863 up from £7,817 in 2021. Running costs particularly Printing & Postage are increasing. Net Current Assets stand at £76,623 (£87,822 – 2021) with Cash of £105,368 (£98,067 – 2021) and Creditors £28,745 (£10,245 – 2021).

Adoption of the report was proposed by Jonno Cook, seconded by Val Bentley, and adopted unanimously.

6. **Retiring members of Council** – Mike Russell (Chair) & Richard Cowser (Conservation Officer) retire from Council having completed their respective terms. Mike was thanked for his time on Council and service to the Society. At this point Alan Perry took time to reflect on Richard's time on Council and his services to the Society following his sad passing earlier in 2023. Richard had held many Council roles and undertaken much work for the Society. Recent years have seen him in the Conservation Officer role were working with other like-minded organisations in Sussex he has had some notable successes, none more so than the Center Parcs issue referred to above. Richard also took the lead role in the rule rewrite that again is covered above. A true stalwart of the Society who will be sadly missed.
7. **Election of new Chair** – Clare Buckle proposed by Mark Mallalieu and seconded by Mike Russell, elected unanimously.
8. **Election of Officers** – Ted Merrikin (Treasurer), Mark Mallalieu (Chair of Scientific Committee) & Alan Swetman (Secretary) all being eligible without nomination were elected unanimously.
9. **Election of new Officer** – Jonno Cook (Chair of Membership & Publicity Committee) proposed Alan Swetman and seconded by Ted Merrikin, elected unanimously.
10. **Election of Members of Council** – Mya Bambrick, Jon Curson & Katie Nethercoat being eligible without nomination were elected unanimously.
11. **Election of new Members of Council** – Tony Benton proposed by Mya Bambrick and seconded by Jon Curson. Elsa Heath proposed by Clare Buckle and seconded by Mya Bambrick both elected unanimously.
12. **Appointment of Kreston Reeves as Examiners of the 2023 Accounts** – proposed Ted Merrikin and seconded by Alan Swetman, appointment confirmed unanimously.
13. **Any other business** – there was no other business and the meeting closed at 14:55.

SAVE SEAFORD'S SWIFTS – 2023/24

It's been a busy year for Seaford's Swifts, with over 12 swift boxes installed at residents' homes. There were also enquiries from other residents whose homes, after checking, were unfortunately not suitable for swift boxes. Below are the criteria That need to be used when assessing the feasibility of installing swift homes -



The above diagram also details information for swift bricks which is a much better solution, however swift bricks can only be installed with a new development/redevelopment. In the last year, we have learnt a great deal more about the needs of swifts, and it became clear that to make this project a success, as swifts are very gregarious, it is important to increase the nesting sites within, or as near as possible, where known colonies exist. In Seaford there appear to be at least 4 different colonies. Also, where residents have had swift boxes installed, we are encouraging them to use swift lures, which is a means of attracting the birds to the nesting site and increases the potential for the birds to use the nest in future. As well as the above, we have attended local events, where we can promote this project and find many members of the public are interested and wish to engage with us and help these birds.

The latest news is that I held a talk at Friends of Bishopstone Station promoting the Save Seaford's Swifts project covering details of these birds' amazing life skills and the need to help them. And most importantly, I was recently invited to give a presentation to Seaford Town Council, who are creating a Climate Change Sub-Committee, with the view to bringing swift bricks into the planning criteria for new developments and large redevelopments. This is a really a no-brainer as Lewes District Council have already introduced this into their planning criteria.

I am also in talks with two local churches in the hope that I can persuade the Trustees and other interested parties to have swift homes installed. This would be exciting and should prove to be a great addition to the colony that exists in Seaford town.

Sheila Lothian, Seaford Swifts

Sussex conservation charities are working together in an innovative scheme to manage wildlife habitats using grazing cattle and goats.



Restoration of heathland and woodland is returning Broadwater Warren in the High Weald AONB to its historic habitat of centuries ago, a wildlife-rich mosaic of heathland and native woodland.

In 2022 the Sussex Ornithological Society generously supported a pilot scheme to develop conservation grazing by goats on the heath, increasing their browsing area from 5 to 11 hectares. From this we have seen benefits in the form of much more varied vegetation structure with abundant growth of flowers that are characteristic of well managed heathland, such as tormentil which is an important source of nectar for solitary bees. We now wish to build on this success, moving to a second phase by opening much larger areas of the heathland to goat grazing using the Nofence system. Traditional containment methods using livestock fencing are appropriate for smaller enclosures but are expensive when extended over large areas. The fences require ongoing maintenance and can detract from the appearance of the landscape. Once installed, traditional fencing typically remains *in situ*, as it is costly and time-consuming to move. The Nofence system of fenceless grazing overcomes these disadvantages. Each goat is fitted with a GPS collar connected to a phone app. The app allows the user

to specify the desired grazing area, which can be altered at the touch of the screen whenever required. When the goat approaches the boundary of the specified area an audible warning is given off; this continues until the boundary is reached, when a very low-level electric pulse is delivered. This pulse is considerably lower than that received from a conventional electric fence. The Nofence system has been widely used by livestock farmers in the United Kingdom and across Europe and has been trialled successfully by the RSPB at Hazeley Heath in Hampshire and Geltsdale in the northern Pennines. Alongside continued regeneration of heathland habitat, conservation goat grazing will also enable us to tackle the problem of successional birch scrub. Left unchecked this quickly dominates the vegetation, crowding out other less vigorous species and the wildlife which depends upon them. At present we manage new birch growth by cutting it back and applying glyphosate to the stumps. The expansion of goat grazing across wider areas will allow us to end our reliance on this chemical approach. We will be able to direct feeding to newly cut areas of birch, where the young shoots will provide attractive forage. The easy adaptability of the grazing area will enable us to move the herd around the heathland throughout the season, ensuring that they continue to enjoy plentiful food supplies while also benefiting vegetation structure. This project will enable us to continue our transition to more natural land management practices, reduce chemical usage and, through the variable browsing behaviours of the goats, improve the heathland habitat and increase biodiversity. The Sussex Ornithological Society have agreed £5,770 funding towards this innovative project.

Nofence grazing will shortly be adopted by Sussex Wildlife Trust's Waltham Brooks Nature Reserve near Pulborough. The 20 cows which graze the site are to be fitted with solar powered GPS collars, part of the Nofence grazing system when the ground allows them to be put to work. This type of grazing will create the habitat structure for waders such as Lapwing and Redshank to breed and feed and a wintering habitat for waders and wildfowl including Snipe, Teal and Wigeon. The Sussex Ornithological Society has contributed £9,025 towards this project.

Sussex Barn Owl Study Group



Some of the Owls ringed by group members during 2023. Photos by Terry Halahan.