

HEREFORDSHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

Minutes of the 70th Annual General Meeting at Holmer Parish Centre on 12th March 2020

Present: (28 members) Judy Allen; Catherine Beech, John Colley, Mick Colquhoun, Mervyn Davies, Russ Davies, Susanna Grunsell, Glennis Harrison, James Hitchcock, Trevor Hulme, Rachel Jenkins, Giles King-Salter, Kerry Lloyd, Mary Mackay, David Macklin, Gareth & Una Morgan, Gerald Parker, Frances Riddell, Chris Robinson, Fiona Shutler, Robert Taylor, Nick Smith, Brian Turner, Frances Weeks, Gerald Wells, Ann Wilkinson, Martin Winrow.

1. Apologies: Rosemary Athay, Nicky Davies, Richard Davies, Peter Eldridge, Tony Eveleigh, Stephanie Greenwood, William Marler, John Pullen, Vivien Quinn, Tom & Jennifer Weale, Dan Webb, Brian Wilder, Jim Wilkinson.

2. Minutes of the 68th Annual General meeting held on 8th March 2018 at Holmer Parish Centre

These had been sent to all members.

3. Adoption of the minutes

Proposer: Una Morgan; Seconder: Martin Winrow. These were adopted without dissent.

4. The Chairman's Report – Susanna Grunsell

“Good evening, we have had another eventful year of changing weather patterns and exciting events in the Club. I am pleased to again thank all those involved in the working of the Club and welcome those we hope to nominate tonight for the next three years. We thank Viv Quinn, a retiring officer from the Committee. We have experienced unexpected changes through the resignations of Nicky Davies as HOC News Editor and Josephine Spencer as Secretary. We are extremely grateful to Mervyn Davies for stepping in at short notice to cover the essential parts of the latter role for the past four months, thereafter there are contingency plans for a limited period. So, the Club is still looking urgently for a permanent, full time replacement for the post of Secretary. We are happy to be nominating a new Editor of the HOC News. It is planned to publish the next issue on 1 May, with a copy deadline of 14 April, following the unavoidable absence of an edition in the last quarter.

May I thank Nicky Davies for her unstinting work as Editor of the HOC News for the past eight years through the massive demands on her time involved in her career development. I don't know how she has done this, but we are extremely grateful for all her work for the Club.

We have had good attendance at our field meetings, with attendance between 9-16 at 14 of our meetings, these included three out of county sites. For full details of these visits please look back at reports in past newsletters. Amazingly the bad weather only led to the cancellation of our planned visit to hear Nightingales in Highnam Woods, and a lack of interest in a trip to Whiteford Burrows. Thank you to the Subcommittee who plan these outings.

Our indoor meetings have continued to have been well attended too. Thanks to the co-ordinating work of Rachel Jenkins we continued to have a splendid selection of indoor meetings with talks on Curlews, Bird Song, and the Ascension Island Sooty Terns. Due to the election in December we did not meet in that month. We were grateful to Robert Taylor and Mick Colquhoun for filling the gap which occurred in January, with an excellent evening about the Wetland Warblers of Herefordshire.

The annual Dr Walker Memorial lecture was given by Professor Nick Davies on the interactions between Cuckoos and their host. He included how the Cuckoo manipulates a host bird when they beg for food, also how a host co-evolves its defence. He shared fascinating research in this field. A brilliant evening.

We are grateful to Ann Wilkinson for continuing to organise the HOC's Garden Birdwatch. In the third quarter last year, records were received from 30 gardens and 58 species were seen, a small decline on 2018 records. The total number of records received was 4,578. In the Top 20 list, the Woodpigeon was seen in 86% of gardens, and the Wren and Swallow in only 26%. The House Sparrow topped the list for the average number of each species seen in gardens at 7.4 birds per garden. If you are interested in joining this valuable work, which involves recording the largest total of each individual species seen in your garden weekly, please contact Ann.

The Curlew project co-ordinated by Chris Robinson, our BTO representative in the Club, has continued this year. There were mixed results with the recordings, with only one bird reported to have fledged in the county in 2019. Chris has been appealing for more volunteers to monitor this project in 2020 and has been pleased with the response from the public.

A Swift survey was carried out on known sites in churches in the county and has continued in Ledbury, where more nest sites were found in 2019 and numbers seen had increased. Nest boxes have been installed at several new sites in the town.

Talks on bird-related topics, supported by digital images have been developed and given by members of the Club to several groups in the county over the past year.

Three bird identification courses have been run, tutored by Dan Webb. These have been mainly successful. It is planned to run further courses in 2020. May I commend Dan Webb's account of his Visible Migration Survey which he recorded in the HOC News of May 2019.

Over the year we have had good links with the Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, and many of our members are involved with their work parties and fund raising in the county. The application for planning permission from Tarmac for development of Wellington Gravel pits in 2019 led to submissions from both our organisations. These highlighted the distinct implications to the wildlife at this site.

Finally, we have just received the Annual Report of 2018. The high standard this publication shows reflects the ongoing dedication of Mervyn Davies and his team. May I heartily thank all involved for their time and effort required for this excellent work.

I hope we will all have a good year of birdwatching ahead this year."

5. The President's address – Gareth Morgan

“Thank you all for being here this evening. I know how easy it can be to find a reason for not going out in the evening, and coronavirus is a genuine excuse this month. Susanna has already mentioned how grateful we are to all the many members, speakers and allied organisations whose efforts have made the past year so interesting and worthwhile, and I offer my thanks also.

Many times, in recent years, we have been made aware of the impact which human activity has had, and continues to have, on the natural world. Even here in Herefordshire we are not immune to these influences – for example: air pollution caused by motor vehicles, or building ever more houses for an increasing population. There is always a good case to be made for such activity, especially if we feel it is convenient for ourselves and our families and businesses. Our elected representatives are only responding to our expressed needs and wants.

For many of us, there comes a time when we (or our heirs and successors) have to face the reality that we have accumulated more material goods than we either need or want. It is at this point that we can ask ourselves : how does this accomplish the objectives of HOC – ‘(i) *To advance public education in the study of wild birds, their habitats and their conservation in the County of Herefordshire and (ii) To promote research in such aspects and to publicise the useful results thereof for the benefit of the public.*’ As members of HOC, we have benefitted from the legacy of our predecessors. It is only right that we in our turn should recruit new members, young and old, and offer them assistance and encouragement to enjoy the full scope of seeing and studying birds in our county and further afield. Another reason to recruit new members is that Club membership is currently tending to reduce, even though the population of the county is increasing.

Many young people are seeking “experiences” rather than physical goods, and we ought to consider how we can market HOC to this group of potential members. I urge you to give some thought to this. When the current global health problems are behind us, hopefully by the Summer, we can put any plans into practice and look forward to a successful time of renewal.

On that happy note, thank you all again, and good birding.”

6. Treasurer & Membership Secretary's Report – Martin Winrow

“First, my thanks to our Auditor Ian Roe for auditing the accounts again.

The Club had a surplus of £968 for 2019, a reduction from £2,003 in 2018. Our overall income was about 10% higher than last year. Attendance at Indoor Meetings continues at a good level and we are covering our costs. Gift Aid refund has risen slightly as has the interest from our savings accounts. We should expect that interest to reduce as we have moved some money into 60-day notice to make it available for spending on benefiting the birds in the county.

This year we gave a large donation of £5,000 to the HWT for creating new islands at the Bodenham Lakes complex. The work was started but some has had to be postponed until next year due to extensive flooding last autumn. Expenditure, as predicted, has increased a little from last year. This again is almost entirely due to the development of the new HOC website which is now finished. The Annual Report appears to be a little more than usual due

to the auditor including the cost for posting it this year. We continue to be grateful to those members who help to keep costs down by delivering Annual Reports to local members.

Overall, HOC finances are in good order and I expect a better surplus this coming year now that the website is complete. HOC now has some £32,594 of unallocated funds. I am therefore not proposing any increase to subscriptions for next year.

A brief update on membership. We had 19 new members last year so that by the end of 2019, there were 291 subscriptions (301 last year) to HOC, including 13 Life & Honorary members. So far this year, we have lost eight members with 23 still to pay/resign, meaning we currently have 266 households. This is a high number of losses and the Committee is going to review our options to reverse the trend.

My first year in the job has been very busy and somewhat challenging. It is amazing how many things the previous committee members were doing, beyond their job descriptions, which I 'inherited' anyway. There has been a lot to learn and everything takes longer the first time you do it. However, I am not daunted and have thoroughly enjoyed it and look forward to doing it all quicker next time round."

The acceptance of the accounts was proposed by Nick Smith and seconded by Robert Taylor and carried unanimously.

7. Election of Officers and committee

The posts as below were up for election at this AGM.

Nominations received before the AGM were:

Secretary: no nomination

Publicity Officer:

Stephanie Greenwood – proposer Robert Taylor; seconder Gerald Wells

HOC News Editor:

Frances Weeks – proposer Robert Taylor; seconder Martin Winrow

Conservation Liaison Officer:

James Hitchcock – proposer Robert Taylor; seconder Mervyn Davies

Ordinary Committee members:

Trevor Hulme – proposer Gareth Morgan; seconder Robert Taylor

Kerry Lloyd – proposer Mervyn Davies; seconder Martin Winrow

Dan Webb – proposer Gerald Wells; seconder Mervyn Davies

A block vote was proposed by Gerald Wells, seconded by Una Morgan and was agreed unanimously.

8 Appointment of Auditor

Ian Roe was proposed as auditor by Martin Winrow, seconded by Gerald Wells and carried unanimously.

9 Motions from the Committee

None

10. Any Motion from any member

None was received.

11. River Wye Award

The recipient of the River Wye Award in 2020, Nicky Davies, was unable to be present, but the President spoke about Nicky's outstanding contribution to the Club during the past eight years as HOC News Editor. Nicky was elected to the post at the 2012 AGM, when Peter Gardner stood down after 40 years as Editor. At the time, Nicky was much involved with Herefordshire Council's Woodpecker Project. Even though she re-located to Cumbria for a time, Nicky used her knowledge and expertise in communication skills to maintain and improve the quality of the News for all levels of members of HOC. During this time, she also studied for and was awarded an excellent MSc (HOC News 238, August 2016). We all wish her well in the future.

Nicky Davies had written a response thanking everyone who had contributed to the newsletter during her time as Editor and referring to a number of key individuals who she had worked closely with. She also wished the new Editor all the best. She said she had enjoyed doing the newsletter and being part of an active Club.

The meeting closed at 8.02 p.m.

The meeting was followed by a Dutch supper. Gerald Wells showed photographs of the 'Birds of Svalbard' from his trip there in 2019 and Mick Colquhoun gave a resume of the 2019 birding year in Herefordshire with a photographic presentation of the rarer birds visiting the county, as well as showing some excellent shots of some more common species.

Mervyn Davies

27th March 2020