

LONDON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
Registered Charity 206228

Report of the Society for the year ending 30 June 2008

History and objectives of the Society

The Society traces its origins to the Haggerstone Entomological Society, founded in 1858. Following mergers with cognate societies, members' interests widened to embrace the study and recording of all aspects of natural history, especially within twenty miles of St Paul's Cathedral. The objects of the Society, last amended in 2005, include also the promotion of scientific investigations, the appreciation and conservation of the natural environment and the publication in the Society's journals of scientific and educational papers.

With habitats changing fast, and introduced species appearing even faster, recording the animals and plants present in the London area must remain a primary objective. As interest in the environment and biodiversity has grown, other organisations have come to rely on the substantial stock of data held by the Society's Recorders, and their expert understanding of the taxa concerned. A revised Records Policy which came into force in 2007 encourages Recorders to make their records available, free of charge but with appropriate safeguards where necessary, to the regional biological records centre, Greenspace Information for Greater London (GiGL). These data are the primary source of records in the London area for many national recording schemes, many of which are now linked to the National Biodiversity Network.

A number of public events, mentioned briefly in the previous Annual Report, have taken place to celebrate the Society's 150th anniversary. Those which fell in the current year included three guided walks – through Haggerston, and in the City of London, for general natural history, and in St James's Park for bird-watching – in June 2008. The anniversary Conference in October, and a commemorative publication, will be noted in next year's Report.

Council, Committees and Sections

Four Trustees (Rodney Burton, David Darrell-Lambert, Mick Massie and Pat Sellar) resigned from Council at the end of 2007. Trustees elected at the AGM included three newcomers (David Allen, Marc Carlton and Dave Dawson) as well as returning and re-elected members including the Treasurer and Secretary. Trustees representing each of the five Sections were elected to Council at Sectional AGMs. As the Society's revised Rules came into force in December 2005, Rule 4(c), limiting a continuous period of elected membership to five years, will first be implemented at the AGM in 2010. Following his election our incoming President, Mark Burgess, gave his address which will appear in *The London Naturalist*.

Besides appointing members of the three standing Committees (Administration and Finance Committee, Library Committee, *London Naturalist* Committee) Council established two Working Groups – the 150th Anniversary Group, charged with organising the special events in 2008, and the Publicity Working Group. The latter arose from the view of Trustees that, as a membership organisation, the Society should make further attempts to reach new audiences in pursuit of its charitable objectives. The Working Group is convened by Jan Hewlett and its recommendations will inform Council's response to the Charity Commission's guidance notes on public benefit, expected by the end of 2008.

During the year David Darrell-Lambert resigned as Chairman of Ornithology Section and was replaced by David Lindo, who also joined Council as representative of the Section. His experience of outreach and public involvement in natural history will be a great asset. David Bevan, Chairman of Botany Section, continues to serve on the Management Board of the London Biodiversity Partnership while John Swindells represents the Society on the GiGL Steering Group. Rodney Burton resigned as Recorder of Vascular Plants and was replaced by Mark Spencer, Curator of the British and Sloane Herbarium at the Natural History Museum. Rodney became Recorder in 1975, on the death of Ted Lousley, Recorder since 1943; we welcome Mark to the ranks of hardy perennials. Ruth Kirk resigned as Fish Recorder but has not yet been replaced.

Membership and communication

The number of individual members currently stands at 968, compared with 942 at the same time last year. 104 new members joined during the year, up from 66 last year. These, if not statistical blips, are encouraging figures following several years of decline and, together with an increase in Gift Aid, account for the 4% rise in subscription income. We record with regret the deaths of the following members during the year to 30 June (date of joining in brackets): Donald Every (1977), Dr Diana Griffith (1981), Richard Gutteridge (1956), Mrs Norah Landells (1946), Dr Ian Menzies (1989), Paul Moxey (1957), Arthur Myers (1938), Mrs Elizabeth Norman (1961), Ken Page (1979), Miss Barbara Pearce (1974), Terry Smeeton (1964), Mrs Christine Winterman (1988) and Miss Jane Woodliff (1992).

Most new members are now recruited through the website and we are indebted to Marc Carlton who as Web Manager has transformed its appearance and usefulness. The members-only website <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/LNHS-members> now has well over 100 participants but this is only a small fraction of our membership; it is a good way, especially for those who are unable to attend field meetings or indoor lectures, to contact like-minded naturalists. An analysis by Robin Blades, Assistant Treasurer, of new members' interests shows an emphasis on ecology, conservation and general natural history for which the present Sectional structure may not cater adequately. Council will consider the implications of this in due course.

For many members, the *Newsletter* is their main contact with the Society. Mindful of this, more colour pages have been introduced. Council also approved expenditure on new publicity material, and for consultancy on outreach and public engagement, following

recommendations of the Publicity Working Group. These included a proposal for a Press Officer, a post which Emma Hinton agreed to fill initially, in addition to her Editorship of the *Newsletter*. All Society officers and appointments are unpaid and Council is most grateful to those members who volunteer to fill them.

The Society's stand at the Lee Valley Spring Wildlife Fair was a great success, attracting much interest and many new members. We congratulate those who staffed it, including Angela Linnell, Mike Trier and Emma herself.

Publications and journals

The London Naturalist **86** for 2007 was published in December, and *London Bird Report* **69** for 2004 in April. Council continued to express concern over the backlog of *LBRs*, and a Special Meeting of Council was requested and convened to discuss the matter. Whilst acknowledging the problems caused by a great increase in the number of records to be processed, Council resolved that the Editor be mandated to produce *London Bird Reports* for both 2005 and 2006, by April 2009; and asked the Committee of Ornithology Section to consult widely and advise Council whether to continue to publish *London Bird Report*, in its present format or otherwise, subsequently. A further request was that progress against a publication schedule be reported to every meeting of Council.

Though it falls outside the period of this Report, it should be mentioned that the Ornithology Committee and the Editor of *LBR*, Andrew Self, have since had constructive meetings, one result of which is the survey of members' opinions on the future of *London Bird Report* and *Ornithological Bulletin*, announced in the August *Newsletter*. It is to be hoped that the outcome will be acceptable both to members and to the wider ornithological community.

Discussions within the Botany Committee have continued over the best way to publish a comprehensive flora of Hampstead Heath, following a detailed survey by members between 1997 and 2003. Meanwhile, the raw data are summarised on a CD of a *Millennial Checklist of the Flowering Plants and Ferns of Hampstead Heath*, available from Sheila Ayres for £2.50 – details are in the *Newsletter* of April 2008.

The Society's Library remains in storage at the Natural History Museum. It is expected that the majority of the stock, relating particularly to the British flora and fauna, will be incorporated within the UK Biodiversity Centre in Phase 2 of the NHM's Darwin Centre which is to open in 2009. The Society will retain ownership, and the public as well as members of the Society will benefit from this resource, but detailed arrangements are yet to be agreed.

Grants in support of the Society's objectives

Few grants have been made in recent years. Council wishes to support projects within the scope of its charitable objectives, and has reviewed the areas which are most likely to attract worthwhile and affordable applications. Discussions are currently in progress with other grant-giving bodies to ensure some degree of cooperation in soliciting applications, and to avoid overlap where possible.

One grant was made this year, to the Hertfordshire Natural History Society to assist publication of *The Moths of Hertfordshire* by Colin Plant. This monograph by an eminent entomologist and Vice-President of the LNHS deals with a county of which one-third lies within the Society's recording area.

Conservation and protection of the environment

Agreement by the Thurrock Development Corporation to an application to build on an entomologically rich site at West Thurrock Marshes was strongly opposed by many organisations including the Society. An appeal against this decision was unsuccessful, but though the prospective developer subsequently withdrew the application, it may re-apply.

This episode was one of several in which the Society has been asked to help oppose developments that threaten London's wildlife and its habitats. While accepting that the term "natural environment" has little or no meaning in London, Council is disposed to support such campaigns where they are clearly aligned with the Society's objectives, and intends to draw up guidelines to assist our Conservation Officer, David Bevan.

The most pressing of these developments is the 2012 Olympics which will have a disproportionate effect on certain London Boroughs. Council invited Paul Robinson of the Hackney Wildlife Group to speak on this. Council agreed to receive the Group's records, to set up a link to its website, and to consider suggestions for joint field meetings.

Members' activities

Once again the hundred or so field meetings – about half arranged by Ornithology Section, the rest equally divided between Botany, and Ecology & Entomology – were well-attended. Details appear in the Sectional reports. Although, inevitably, each Section has its "hard core" of regular attendees, there are as usual a gratifying number of newcomers to the Society, and others attending once or twice before deciding whether to join. Leaders of meetings do their best to make beginners and novices welcome, and feedback to Council suggests that they succeed more often than not.

Besides the anniversary guided walks, mentioned earlier, and the regular programme of indoor meetings (some now held at London Wildlife Trust's Camley Street Natural Park) the second of the annual lectures held jointly with the London and Middlesex Archeological Society took place, at which Todd Langstaffe-Gowan described in vivid detail the restoration and replanting of the gardens at Hampton Court Palace.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the Charity Commission's Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP 2005) for Trustees' Annual Reports.

Approved at the Annual General Meeting, 9th December 2008