

LONDON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
Registered Charity 206228

Report of the Society for the year ending 30 June 2009

Objectives

The objects of the Society are the study and recording of natural history, archaeology and other kindred subjects, especially within twenty miles of St Paul's Cathedral, 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. Activities and achievements in respect of these objectives are described below.

Governance: Council, Committees and Sections

The Society is governed by a Council of Trustees, comprising the officers (President, Treasurer, Secretary), ten representatives of the members at large and one representative of each of the Society's Sections (currently five). Sarah Graham-Brown joined the Council as a representative of the members at large, while Marc Carlton and Pippa Hyde resigned as Trustees. Catherine Schmitt (Ecology & Entomology Section) was replaced by David Howdon, and Stuart Cole took over from Ian Swinney as representative for the Bookham Common Survey. The remaining Trustees were re-elected. Rule 4(c), limiting a continuous period of elected membership to five years, came into force in December 2005 and will first be implemented at the AGM in 2010. Administration and Finance Committee, chaired by Colin Bowlt, deals with much delegated business.

Council appointed David Bevan an Honorary Vice-President of the Society in recognition of his services to botany, conservation and public appreciation of wildlife, particularly among young people. David continues to serve on the Management Board of the London Biodiversity Partnership, having successfully resisted an ill-judged attempt to deny both the Society, and London Wildlife Trust, permanent membership of the Board. The Society offers the Partnership, otherwise largely consisting of statutory bodies with limited knowledge of the natural environment in which they operate, an independent source of information and advice.

On the recommendation of its Chairman, David Lindo, and with the agreement of Council, the Committee of Ornithology Section decided to change the Section's name to "The London Bird Club - part of the London Natural History Society".

Membership

115 new members joined during the year, up from 104 last year. The number of individual members currently stands at 1003, compared with 968 at the same time last year, and 942 the previous year. Two factors, active recruitment at events such as the Lee Valley Spring Wildlife Weekend, and the Society's attractive and informative website, probably account for this welcome rise following several years of decline. The Society is not just for experts – field meetings are planned with beginners in mind, and newcomers are encouraged to play an active part in the Society's affairs. Towards the end of the year, the Society was successful in securing funding from the Open Air Laboratory project

(OPAL) to run a series of weekend events for family audiences, intended to enhance their knowledge of urban wildlife and to encourage a younger membership. There will be a fuller report on this project next year.

We record with regret the deaths of the following members during the year to 30 June (date of joining in brackets): Miss Maureen Currie (1960), Mrs Pamela Goldsmith (1967), Mrs Edna Greenwood (1966), Mr Hugh Jones (1988), Mr W.G. (Bunny) Teagle (1945), Mr Cyril Walker (1956), Mrs Pamela Washer (1958), Miss Kay Wilson (1985). Miss Currie was Chairman of the Ecology Section 1971-72, and later Secretary of the Ecology & Entomology Section. Obituaries of Bunny Teagle and Cyril Walker will appear in *The London Naturalist*.

Anniversary events

The Society traces its origins to the formation in 1858 of the Haggerstone Entomological Society, subsequently the City of London Natural History Society, which merged in 1914 with the North London Natural History Society to form the LNHS. Following the field meetings in Haggerston and elsewhere, mentioned in last year's Report, the main event to mark the 150th anniversary was a conference, "London's Natural History – Past, present, and future" held at the Linnean Society on Saturday 11th October 2008. Organised jointly with our hosts and the Society for the History of Natural History, the conference was opened by Dr Helen Phillips, Chief Executive of Natural England. The hundred members and guests who attended heard seven absorbing and thought-provoking talks which will be published, together with Dr Phillips' opening address, in *The London Naturalist*.

A selection of classic papers from *The London Naturalist*, introduced by commentaries on their past and present relevance, was published as *London's Changing Natural History*, edited by our President Mark Burgess. A wall calendar for 2009, profusely illustrated by members' photographs, was produced for the Society with consummate skill by Mike Trier; it was well received and much in demand as a small Christmas gift. Also in December, members who attended the AGM were treated to a showing of the Society's film *London's Birds*, first shown in 1963. The commentary was provided by Pat Sellar who has transferred the original cine-film to DVD.

Recording

The Records Policy, under which Recorders should make their data available to the local records centre, Greenspace Information for Greater London (GiGL), was mentioned last year. Council is concerned that not all Recorders have indicated their willingness to carry out this policy, which is clearly in the public interest and in line with our charitable objectives. John Swindells, the Society's representative on the GiGL Steering Group, is addressing the problem.

On the initiative of Mark Spencer, Recorder for Vascular Plants, plans are advancing for a new flora of Greater London to replace Rodney Burton's *Flora of the London Area*. These were outlined, to great enthusiasm, at meetings which attracted visitors and Recorders from neighbouring Watsonian vice-counties, as well as LNHS members. It is

now necessary to translate this enthusiasm into “square bashing” by the many volunteer recorders needed to carry out this project over the next few years.

Entomology appointments include Tristan Bantock as Recorder for Hemiptera (true bugs) and Andy Keay as Recorder for soil-dwelling invertebrates (Diplura, Isopoda, Myriapoda). Amanda Waterfield resigned as Recorder for Lichens, while all but one of the bird Recorders, who have geographical responsibilities, have changed: Richard Bonser takes over Inner London from Des Mackenzie; Joan Thompson replaces Adam Wilson in Hertfordshire; in Kent and Lower Thames, John Archer succeeds Steve Spooner who moves up-river to Surrey and Upper Thames in place of John Horton; finally, Christopher Langsdon gives way to Roy Woodward in Essex while Mark Pearson replaces Rob Innes in Middlesex.

A problem currently exercising Council is how to make card files containing some 800,000 historic bird records from 1900 to 1987 to accessible for data mining and scientific study. A likely solution is to scan the cards manually and store the electronic images for subsequent indexing and digitising.

Journals and other publications; Library

The London Naturalist **87** (2008) was published in December 2008, *London Bird Report* **70** (2005) in October 2008, and **71** (2006) in May 2009 (though printing delays meant that it did not reach members until September). Thus Council’s requirement that both these *LBRs* appear by April 2009 was largely met. The Ornithology Committee considered the future of the *LBR* and the *Ornithological Bulletin* in light of the survey of members’ opinions mentioned last year, and recommended that the former continue to be published in its present format, with changes to speed its production and increase its interest to members and the general public, but that the Bulletin be discontinued. Council will consider these recommendations in the wider context of communicating to members via the *Newsletter* and the website. Emma Hinton resigned as *Newsletter* Editor due to other commitments, and was replaced by Nick Bertrand.

A few days after the end of the period covered by this Report came the welcome news that the Society’s Library, held in storage at the Natural History Museum, would soon be accessible once more to members and the public. Thanks to the efforts of Library Committee Secretary David Allen and our Librarian Linda Hewitt, all the books and some of the journals, including those published by the LNHS, are now shelved in the Angela Marmont Centre for UK Biodiversity at the NHM’s Darwin Centre Phase 2 which was opened by Prince William in September. The Society will retain ownership. Detailed arrangements for access, both to the open shelves and the remainder of the collection, are yet to be agreed, but it is a pleasure to record that the Society’s assets are again being used for the public benefit.

Grants in support of the Society’s objectives

Last year a grant of £1000 was made to the Hertfordshire Natural History Society to assist publication of *The moths of Hertfordshire*. A similar sum has been awarded to HNHS this year to support publication of *Flora of Hertfordshire* by Trevor James. As a

considerable portion of the county lies within our Society's recording area, these publications are of mutual benefit.

Conservation of the natural environment

Rich habitats are still under threat from developers, though these are currently less active in the depressed economic climate. The Society is often asked to lend its voice to protests against such developments. Council's view is that an appropriate campaigning body in such cases is the London Wildlife Trust, the Society being willing to provide evidence-based advice if required. Proposals that would affect Rotherhithe Ecology Park, and East India Dock Basin, fall under this category. One threat that has been lifted is the London Gateway Bridge from Thamesmead to Barking that would have destroyed good examples of saltmarsh and mature brownfield habitats on both banks; the proposal was withdrawn by the Mayor in July 2009. The full effects of the Olympic Park on the plants, birds, insects and fish of east London remain to be seen – they are likely to be dire. London has seen great changes before and no doubt will again. Our Society, we hope, will still be recording them 150 years hence.

This report has been prepared with due regard to the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit.