



Annual Report of the  
**London Natural History Society**

for the year ending  
**30<sup>th</sup> June 2003**

**Secretary:**

J. A. Edgington  
19 Mecklenburgh Square  
London WC1N 2AD

**Treasurer:**

M.J. West  
52 Trinity Road  
Ware  
Herts SG12 7DD

**Bankers:**

National Westminster Bank plc  
1 The Mall  
Ealing  
London W5 2PL

**Auditors:**

Baker Tilly  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor Centinal  
46 Clarendon Road  
Watford

Herts WD17 1HE  
**LONDON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY**  
REPORT OF THE COUNCIL TO THE MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE PERIOD  
1<sup>st</sup> JULY 2002 – 30<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2003

The previous Annual Report was the last prepared by Tony Barrett who retired in December 2002 after 11 years as Secretary. Council, and your new Secretary in particular, is grateful to Tony for continuing to chair the Administration and Finance Committee. Thanks too are due to Colin Bowlt who took on the Chairmanship of Council at short notice, handing over at the AGM in December 2002 to our new President, Jan Hewlett.

The President's address to the AGM followed a remarkable 16 mm film of the City of London in the 1950s, taken by Bunny Teagle and edited, with Bunny's contemporary commentary, by Pat Sellar. Jan contrasted the bombsites and their opportunistic wildlife with today's different but no less interesting habitats and species in the City. The President, having reported that a handsome leather-bound copy of *The Natural History of Buckingham Palace Garden* (LNHS 1999, 2001) had been sent to Her Majesty the Queen to mark her Golden Jubilee, then presented similar volumes to Mark Lane, Head Gardener at Buckingham Palace, and Colin Plant, editor.

A highlight of the year was the publication of *The Breeding Birds of the London Area* (LNHS 2002), edited by Jan Hewlett and with a Foreword by Richard Fitter, our former President. We were delighted to welcome Richard to launch the book at a special conference on London's birds. This marks the completion of a major recording project to which very many members have contributed. A historical perspective was provided by Max Nicholson, distinguished ornithologist, environmentalist of international repute and a member of your Society for nearly 70 years. Sadly, we record Max's death in April, at the age of 98. Obituaries in the national press testified to the esteem in which this self-effacing but enormously influential man was held. Max's *Birdwatching in London* (LNHS 1995) describes how as a young man he revolutionised the scientific study of bird behaviour in a regional context, and inspired others to continue and extend his work. An obituary by Richard Fitter will appear in the *London Naturalist*. Others whose deaths we record include J.K.Adams, Marjorie Campbell (member since 1949), Brian Fletcher, Don Freshwater (1947), Jean Leith-Buchanan, Brian Mist, R.H.Slader and Joyce Smith (1954).

#### **MEMBERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION**

Robin Blades succeeded the late Ruth Day as membership secretary, assisted by Jenny Devos who manages the Society's database. Robin's title of Assistant Treasurer recognises the importance of subscription income to the Society's viability. The AGM in 2002 approved an increase in subscriptions, the first for six years, to take effect from January 2004.

Membership at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2003 was 1,010, a decline of 10% in three years and 20% in six. The Society's vitality as a recording and conserving body, as well as its financial well-being, depends on healthy recruitment and the concerns raised over several years are now a real worry. Thus, Council has commissioned a full-colour publicity leaflet to attract new members. And with so many campaigning organisations now entering the environmental arena, the Society must make sure its historic objectives remain relevant today. Your President and Council wish to hear the

views of members and urge you to attend a full-day open meeting at the London Wetland Centre on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2004 when the main purpose will be to consider the Society's aims and activities.

The *Newsletter*, now edited by Graeme Lyall in succession to Tony Leppard, continues to be the main channel of communication with members. The Society has been slower than some to embrace new technology but the website is now well-established though not all activities yet appear on it. While recognising that only some of our volunteer members have IT skills, Council will encourage all sections to maintain attractive webpages which are many people's introduction to the Society.

## **PUBLICATIONS AND JOURNALS**

*The London Naturalist* No.81, edited by Keith Hyatt and published in December 2002, contained peer-reviewed research papers, compilations of recent and archival records, historical surveys and scholarly contributions on various themes, as well as reports from the Society's sections, book reviews and obituaries. As usual some articles were of more than local or even regional significance – for example, Edward Milner's report of a spider new to Britain that he discovered at Mile End Park, which was the subject of an article in *The Times* of 24<sup>th</sup> December 2002.

The *London Bird Report* No.64, for 1999, was published in September 2002, with articles and illustrations of the high standard we have come to expect. The fact that some 450 observers contributed records confirms the depth of interest among our members, as well as the logistical task facing the editor Andrew Self and his team.

Catherine Schmitt, our Publications Sales officer, has now sold the very last copy of Rodney Burton's *Flora of the London Area*, 20 years after publication. Copies of Colin Plant's *Butterflies of the London Area* and *Larger Moths of the London Area*, and Max Nicholson's *Birdwatching in London*, are still available.

## **RESEARCH STATIONS**

### **Bookham Common Survey**

The major survey of the Common's vegetation and its changes over fifty years is now complete, and Bryan Radcliffe and Ken Page's account will appear in the *The London Naturalist*. This will also include Ian Menzies' discovery of the rare strawberry spider, *Araneus alsine*. Over 1500 beetle species have now been recorded while among the birds, raptors such as common buzzard and red kite have been reported.

Roof damage to our hut at Bookham, and a request by the National Trust to move it to a new site, led to Council reviewing the Society's requirements. It was concluded that a new, larger hut would relieve overcrowding and enable members to continue indefinitely their survey work on behalf of the Society and the Trust. Council agreed to name the new facility The Ruth Day Memorial Hut. An appeal to members for contributions has had a gratifying response and it is hoped to have the new hut ready in good time for next season.

### **Hampstead Heath Survey**

Begun in 1996, this is a relatively new activity for the Society, and at present suffers from a lack of volunteers willing to carry out methodical species recording. Nevertheless the long-awaited Flora of the Heath, to replace the GLC's booklet of 1986, is nearly complete, and it is reported that the Superintendent of the Heath was greatly impressed when he inspected the Society's work during an unscheduled visit to our base, provided by the City Corporation, on the Heath Extension.

## **SECTIONS**

### **Botany**

The varied programme of field meetings, over 20 in all, attracted good numbers of members. Notable among the indoor meetings was Chris Preston's talk on changes to the British flora with reference to the *New Atlas of the British & Irish Flora*. Members who had collected records for this, and Rodney Burton who tirelessly collated, sifted and submitted all Middlesex records as well as being the Regional Co-ordinator, were pleased with the generally enthusiastic reception of the *New Flora*.

### **Ecology and Entomology**

The Section held several well-attended field meetings. Members represented your Society at the Amateur Entomologists Society (AES) annual exhibition at Kempton Park, and an advertisement has been placed in the new edition of the AES Directory. Indoor meetings including the Brad Ashby Memorial Lecture were well supported. The office of Chairman remains vacant, following John Thompson's resignation. The Section's Secretary, Catherine Schmitt, again organised a most enjoyable Social Evening for all members

### **Ornithology**

This very active Section held 50 field meetings, both within London and by coach to points far beyond, and many members took part in national bird surveys. The Society was represented by members of the Section at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Lee Valley Bird Fair, and reported brisk sales of *The Breeding Birds of the London Area*. David Darrell-Lambert is the Section's new Chairman, succeeding David Rear.

## **LIBRARY**

The addition of 96 books and reports brought total holdings to some 7000 after pruning to remove duplicates and superseded editions. 140 journals are also taken. Most volumes are on open shelves at Imperial College but some more valuable items are in the Library's basement office. Our Librarian Linda Hewitt has produced data which show that the 60 or so members who hold reader's tickets made about two visits each per year, in addition to casual visits by members without tickets. Though the Library is used mostly for reference, readers borrowed about three books each last year. These are the first reliable figures for Library usage. Council is grateful to Linda for her hard work throughout the year, and the staff at Imperial College for their cooperation.

During the year your Council approved a revised version of the Library policy which appears in the Programme. The Library's co-location with those of Imperial College and the Science Museum, and adjacent to the collections and libraries of the Natural History Museum, is conducive to both research and casual reading and it is a pity it is not more used by members. An on-line

catalogue including most of the Society's holdings is available by searching under "Imperial College" at <http://www.copac.ac.uk/copac>.

### **CONSERVATION AND BIODIVERSITY**

The London Biodiversity Partnership (LBP), representing public and private bodies interested in conservation issues, is responsible through its members for implementing London's Biodiversity Action Plan (London BAP). The Society is a partner in LBP and your Council, after considering the matter carefully, has signed the Partnership's Memorandum of Understanding. Your Conservation Officer, David Bevan, will represent the Society on the Partnership's policy-making body, the Project Board. Council is being consulted about the Partnership's business plan and is represented by your Secretary on the Business Planning Group. Members of the Society contribute to several of the working groups of the London BAP, including those for house sparrows and mistletoe.

The LBP can only help protect and conserve London's wildlife if it has access to a comprehensive database of existing habitats and species. Plans to set up a London Biodiversity Records Centre (LBRC) are well advanced and Council received a presentation from the London Wildlife Trust, the lead partner in a planning consortium that includes your Society. The relationship between the LBP and LBRC is a critical one, with your Council advocating an independent Records Centre supplying neutral data to customers including the LBP. This is also the option preferred by consultants in a report commissioned by LBP. Since members of the Society are responsible, in a wholly voluntary and private capacity, for a large proportion of the species records that the LBRC will hope to process, a satisfactory outcome is of considerable concern to Council.

Away from local politics, an event of national significance is the discovery by our member Brian Wurzell of creeping marshwort, *Apium repens*, on Walthamstow Marsh, only the second British site for this extremely rare plant. English Nature and other organisations have implemented ambitious measures to conserve and enhance the habitat, and accounts of the discovery are in preparation.

### **OTHER MATTERS**

The Treasurer's report describes the decline in value of the Society's investments and the steps being taken to counteract this and to bring income and expenditure into balance. An important duty of Council is to examine and mitigate any threats to the Society's viability, and the results of a recent risk assessment will be considered carefully. Such matters are relatively new concerns but the Society cannot afford to ignore them.

Finally, Council is enormously grateful to all those members who offer their services freely and willingly, and especially to those who serve as officers and in other capacities. It is clear from the activities reported above that thanks to all their efforts the Society is continuing to meet its charitable objectives, first formulated nearly 150 years ago.

Fuller reports on the activities of the Research Stations and Sections are published in *The London Naturalist*.

## LONDON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

MEMBERS OF COUNCIL 1<sup>ST</sup> JULY 2002 – 30<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2003

N. Anderson		Dr. J.F. Hewlett*	(President)
A.J. Barrett*		P.C. Holland	
K.F. Betton		K.H. Hyatt	
D. Bevan		A.J. Leppard*	
R.A. Blades*	(Assistant Treasurer)	Dr. I.S. Menzies	
Dr. C. Bowlt		D.J. Montier*	
Miss E.P. Brown		E.M. Nicholson	dec'd April 2003
M. Burgess		R.M. Payne	
R.M. Burton*		C.W. Plant	
R.E. Butler		Mrs C.M. Schmitt	
Ms A. Chipchase		A. Self	
Dr. P.F.S. Cornelius		P.J Sellar	
Ms N.A. Duckworth*		R.A. Softly	
Dr. J.A. Edgington*	(Secretary)	Miss. F.J. Turtle	
R.S.R. Fitter		M.J. West*	(Treasurer)
R.W. Hale		H.M.V. Wilsdon*	
Mrs. L. Hewitt			

\*member of Administration and Finance committee as at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2003.