



Annual Report of the
London Natural History Society
for the year ending
30th June 2005

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LONDON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
REPORT OF THE COUNCIL TO THE MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE PERIOD
1ST JULY 2004 – 30TH JUNE 2005

By the time this appears in print eighteen months will have elapsed since the end of the year to which it relates, so it would be remiss not to include a brief mention of events in the latter half of 2005. Amongst these, sadly, was the death at the age of 92 of Richard Fitter, a former President of the Society. Richard's enthusiasm, matched only by his vast knowledge of natural history in general and London in particular, was an inspiration to all. The Secretary's dog-eared copy of *London's Natural History*, awarded as a school prize in 1950, is personal testimony to that. We mourn, too, the passing of Richard Butler, another ex-President and the Society's leading geologist, and Wyn Wheeler, Fish Recorder for many years and doyen of Britain's ichthyologists.

As Honorary Vice-Presidents of the Society, both Richards were *ex officio* members of Council and hence Trustees with legal responsibilities under Charity law – not a burden they and others in a similar position necessarily wished to bear. This is one of the issues addressed by the Working Group set up by Council to revise the Society's Rules, last changed in 1979. The Group's proposals, which accompany this Report, have been accepted by Council and the Charity Commission and will be put to the membership at the Annual General Meeting in December. If approved, the new Rules will come into force immediately.

A small but significant change is the addition of "recording" to the Society's Objects. For many members this is one of the Society's most significant activities and its species records constitute perhaps the largest and certainly the most comprehensive collection for the London area, with an unmatched historical reach. Last year's Report mentioned that discussions had begun with the local records centre, Greenspace Information for Greater London (GIGL), on how it could access these. Encouraged by the National Biodiversity Network (NBN), it has been agreed to start with a pilot study of selected taxa whose Recorders hold data on paper or in electronic form. With encouragement from NBN and LNHS, GIGL is seeking support from DEFRA for a staff member to assist Recorders with this task. This is an appropriate time to review the Society's policies on species and habitat records and a Working Group to consider such matters as their ownership, confidentiality and sensitivity has been set up under our President, John Swindells.

London's Royal Parks are among its best-recorded places and were the theme of Jan Hewlett's retiring Presidential Address. Since stepping down, Jan has represented the Society in a consortium preparing to nominate Downe, Charles Darwin's home in Bromley, as a World Heritage Site. Records for the neighbourhood, both historic and current, will be important to making the case and members wishing to help are invited to contact a member of Council. The environs of Downe are well protected. Not so the lower Lea Valley where the Olympics will be held in 2012. The Society is joining other conservation bodies including the London Wildlife Trust to promote policies to mitigate the consequences for the area with its many species-rich brownfield sites.

A significant event in the wildlife year was the arrival in Britain of the Harlequin Ladybird, first in Essex, then in South London and now widespread in our district, as carefully documented by

our Recorder Paul Mabbott. It is a threat to our native ladybirds, and probably here to stay unless an exceptionally severe winter checks its progress.

MEMBERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION

At 30th June 2005 total membership was 1040, slightly up from last year and the first increase, albeit a small one, for some years. Subscription income is generally sufficient to meet the costs of our regular publications while interest on the Society's reserves provides income to support other charitable activities and occasional publications. With a larger membership there would be greater potential for raising Londoners' awareness of the city's natural heritage. Council has appointed Mark Burgess, a Trustee with good contacts, as Press Officer. If members pass on their news and discoveries to Mark he will endeavour to place them in London-based media such as *Time Out*, the *Evening Standard* and local radio and newspapers.

The Society has contributed to the start-up costs of an annual magazine, *Oasis*, produced by the Royal Parks Wildlife Group for distribution to schools and libraries in London and for sale to visitors to the Royal Parks. LNHS is featured on the back page.

Having no premises of its own the Society has, since the 1940s, been privileged to use the Natural History Museum as its postal address. Last year, in the context of discussions about areas of possible co-operation, the Linnean Society offered to provide LNHS with a pigeon-hole for correspondence. Located in Piccadilly, this would be slightly more central and accessible to the Society's officers, who agreed to accept the offer. Council are most grateful to the staff of the NHM, most recently our member Stephen Brooks of the Entomology Department, who have been kind enough to deal with mail arriving at the Museum. The new postal address will gradually replace the NHM on all the Society's publications.

LNHS traces its origins to the Haggerstone Entomological Society, founded in 1858. Council is starting to consider how to celebrate the sesquicentenary in 2008. As plans develop there will be announcements and discussion in the *Newsletter* to which all members are invited to contribute.

PUBLICATIONS AND JOURNALS

London Bird Report 65 (2000) was published in July 2004. The lengthening intervals between issues continued to concern Council which was accordingly most grateful to Paul Cornelius who agreed to write single-handedly the species accounts for 2001. Unfortunately, personal circumstances prevented Paul completing the task in the time foreseen so the remainder was completed by the editorial team under the leadership of Andrew Self. *LBR* 66 (2001) is due to appear in December 2005. In order to eliminate the back-log, Council took the unusual step of offering paid contracts to write the species accounts for 2002 and 2003, by competitive tender following open advertisement. As a result *LBR* 67 (2002) and *LBR* 68 (2003) will appear as a double issue in the first half of 2006. Following reorganisation of tasks amongst members of his editorial team, Council expects *LBR* to return to its usual schedule.

The London Naturalist 83, for 2003, included for the first time a systematic review of records of fungi, old and new, and a fascinating account of a scandal involving members of the above-mentioned Haggerstone Entomological Society in the nineteenth century. At the AGM in 2004 members expressed concern that publication of accepted papers should not be delayed, and as Editor, Keith Hyatt will continue to meet this request as far as possible. The colourful *Newsletter* has been well received. Under its Editor Graeme Lyall it is becoming a forum for stimulating correspondence as well as Society announcements and reports.

RESEARCH STATIONS

The new Bookham Common Survey hut in the grounds of the National Trust's Merritt's Cottage was formally opened on the 9th October by the President Jan Hewlett in the presence of some forty members and friends. After describing the contribution Ruth Day had made to the Society in general and to study of Bookham and its dragonflies in particular, Jan unveiled an elegant marquetry plaque in Ruth's memory. Thanking the National Trust and its Warden, Ian Swinney, for their support, Jan noted that the Ruth Day Memorial Hut would not have been possible without the funds contributed by members and the sterling work and leadership of the Survey's chairman, Ian Menzies. This was a cue for enthusiastic applause and an attack on the excellent refreshments provided by the Survey team.

Beetles have been studied at Bookham since the Survey started. About one-third of the British species have been recorded and an annotated checklist, *The beetles of Bookham Common*, is being prepared for publication. Details will appear in the *Newsletter*.

Keith Cavanagh succeeded Colin Bowlt as Chairman of the Hampstead Heath Survey. Jenny and Denzil Devos, as well as running a programme of themed monthly activities for the Survey, have assembled records gathered by many members as the basis for a new *Flora of Hampstead Heath*. At the time of writing, an electronic version of the checklist is being tested with a view to publishing a traditional flora in book form, in collaboration with the City Corporation.

SECTIONS

Details of Sectional activities appear elsewhere but the sheer number of meetings listed in the Programme is impressive: Botany Section arranged 25 field meetings and seven indoor meetings during the year, Ecology & Entomology Section twelve and five while Ornithology Section notched up 53 and five giving a grand total of 107 events for members. This is in addition to the monthly meetings at Bookham Common and Hampstead Heath. Sections are now arranging some meetings to cater for members' wider interests in natural history; six meetings were designated "General" and several others not so named ranged well beyond Sectional topics. A number of meetings, field and indoor, were held jointly with other organisations, following the lead set by the Brad Ashby Memorial Lecture, organised in collaboration with the British Entomological and Natural History Society. The Society was represented at a number of events including the Lee Valley and Rainham Marshes Bird Fairs, Wildlife and Open Days at the Natural History Museum, and the annual exhibition of the Amateur Entomologists' Society; Council is very grateful to those members who give their time to publicise the Society's activities.

LIBRARY

Librarian Linda Hewitt added 66 volumes to stock, while nearly 200 loans were recorded by the Issues Desk. Records kept by Imperial College show that this is up on last year, and there has been a steady increase in the total for a few years now. Moreover the number of members holding Library cards increased to 52. Linda would like to thank the staff at Imperial for their continued support at a time when the College's Library provision is under financial pressure.

CONSERVATION AND BIODIVERSITY

Freda Turtle organised five field meetings of the Nature Conservation Working Group; these are additional to Sectional meetings. They cover all aspects of natural history and members who have not yet attended one are encouraged to do so. David Bevan was again active in his role of Conservation Officer. At the end of the year David retired from his post with Haringey Council.

To celebrate the occasion a party was held for him at Railway Fields, the nature reserve with which he is particularly associated. The event was well attended by David's friends from the Society, delighted that thanks to his efforts Railway Fields had just been awarded "Green Flag" status by the Civic Trust.