

LONDON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
Registered Charity 206228

Report of the society for the year ending 30 June 2023

Objects

The objects of the London Natural History Society are the study and recording of natural history, archaeology and other kindred subjects 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 - currently vacant, Treasurer Mike West, & Secretary Annie Wilson), up to ten members' representatives - David Bevan, Ian Woodward, Jan Hewlett, Wendy Knight, Robin Blades, Joanne Maddox, Pete Mantle and Noel Brock - and one representative of each of the Society's sections - Liz Andrew (London Bird Club), Maureen Parry (Botany), Anke Marsh (Ecology and Entomology) and Kat Duke (Hampstead Heath Survey). The post of Bookham Commons representative is vacant.

The President's role remains unfilled and this year the Society is very sorry to say goodbye - and a huge thank you - to Mike West who is stepping down as Treasurer after more than thirty years. We are very keen to fill all the vacancies on Council, so please consider joining us to help keep your Society going. We are looking for people with a range of skills and interests, but you do not need to be an expert in natural history.

The Administration and Finance Committee, chaired by Michael Wilsdon, meets five times a year to deal with delegated business, whilst Robin Blades soldiers away in the background managing our membership. We are pleased to welcome Elliot Newton as our Conservation Officer taking over from David Bevan after many years, and Leslie Bolsover taking over the role of Librarian from Julie Berk. The Trustees would like to thank all participants for their contributions and commitment to the Society.

Despite a relaxation of restrictions, people's work patterns have not returned to the pre-covid norm so a lot of society business continues to be conducted using Zoom technology. The 2022 AGM amended the Society's rules to make explicit that General Meetings and meetings of the trustees can be held online or by hybrid methods. On a positive note, this makes attendance possible for those who live further afield. The Society is exploring accessibility considerations for outdoor meetings and plans to arrange some field meetings which are programmed with accessibility in mind.

Finances

The annual financial report accompanies this report. The Society continues to benefit from members who subscribe to the gift aid scheme, for which we are very grateful. Members who qualify to use the gift aid scheme but have not signed up are encouraged to consider doing so. The Society has also been the grateful recipient of several generous bequests.

Activities

The Virtual Talks team continues to host 'online' talks using Zoom, which are available for a limited time on YouTube after the meeting. These talks remain very popular and still attract new audience members from more geographically diverse locations than in-person meetings. The Society thanks our many speakers, who generously share their time and expertise to entertain us and recognises the hard work of the team to facilitate and support the talks.

A full and varied programme of field meetings was offered throughout the year. The walks were well supported, regularly attracting new attendees who sometimes became members. Many thanks to everyone who volunteers their time and knowledge to make these events happen. New leaders and attendees are always welcome.

Regular monthly Saturday field meetings at Bookham Commons continue despite the lack of a committee. The LNHS ecological survey of Bookham Commons, a Site of Special Scientific Interest near Leatherhead in Surrey, has been running continuously for more than eighty years with the result that Bookham Commons is one of the best-documented sites in the UK. Members are strongly encouraged to visit this wonderful site and contribute to the survey. We would love to be able to form a new committee to guide this work.

Journals and other publications

The London Naturalist 101 (2022), ably edited by Clive Herbert for the first time, was distributed to members in December. It comprised annual reports from officers and articles of interest covering natural history of the London area contributed by members. The editorial team continues to produce a high-quality journal of which the Society can be proud.

The London Bird Report No 86 for the year 2021 was published in May 2023. This annual publication is a tribute to the many individuals who contribute significant time and effort to produce a high quality record of London's bird observations for 2021. Thank you to everyone involved.

The Newsletter edited by Mark Burgess and published four times a year continues to provide members with regular news on the activities and operation of the Society, and members' contributions. We encourage all members, old and new, to consider submitting items for publication.

Amy Muiyui Lui efficiently manages production of the programme twice a year. This is one of the Society's key publicity tools for attracting new members.

Leslie Williams (LNHS Butterfly Recorder) is nearing publication of the updated 'Butterflies of the London Area', originally published in 1987. Colin Plant (LNHS Moth Recorder) and Les Evans Hill continue work on an updated version of 'Larger Moths of the London Area', and Mark

Spencer (LNHS Flowering Plant Recorder & Vascular Cryptogam Recorder) is making good progress on an updated edition of 'Flora of the London Area', both last published in 1983. Each of these publications will contribute to the conservation of London habitats and wildlife. The Publications Committee is being reconvened to manage these imminent publications and help bring them to fruition.

We thank all our social media editors for publicising the Society and its events. All platforms - website, Facebook, Twitter/X and Instagram - continue to prove extremely useful in keeping members up to date and attracting new joiners.

Membership

130 new members joined the society during the membership year ending 30/09/2023. The total membership was 981, down from 1020 last year but still above pre-pandemic levels.

While many new members are attracted by our programme and social media presence, we are very grateful to existing members who recruit friends because they think will enjoy what we have to offer. We encourage people to keep doing this and help the Society to continue to grow. Everyone is welcome to join field meetings or virtual talks to get a taste of the Society before they join.

We are very sorry to record the deaths of the following members (date of joining in brackets) during the year and thank them for their support of the Society, in several cases over many decades: Mrs Patricia Dickinson (2010), Mr David Harrison (1998), Mr Simon Ogram (2002), Mr Peter Oliver (1965), Dr Arthur Harold Smith (1946), Mr Duncan Tait (2020).

Recording and research

Thanks go to all our recorders for their support and continuing hard work. They do an invaluable job of gathering data on most of the species to be found in the London area, ensuring that the information is shared, and generously help individuals with their enquiries.

In 2022, the LNHS was awarded a grant from the City of London Corporation to map key flora, fungi and lichens in the different habitats on Hampstead Heath. The project, known as the Millennial Flora of Hampstead Heath Project 2022, led by Liz Andrew (the Hampstead Heath Survey Chair), is about halfway through and will provide a baseline to monitor changes that might occur in the future due to habitat degradation or/or climate change.

In 2022, the Rewild London Programme funded a project to map and improve hedgehog and wildlife populations in north London. Led by the Institute of Zoology and Jeff Waage, on behalf of LNHS, the project focused on the possibility of improving and linking established populations in Regents Park and Hampstead Heath, particularly through local Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINCs). The findings have been shared with local groups to develop connecting corridors around Hampstead Heath.

The Council met with GiGL (Greenspace Information for Greater London) in September 2022 to discuss setting up a data sharing agreement. We know this is not popular with everyone, but

several recorders already have very productive relationships with GiGL and a majority of members are in favour. Discussions will, hopefully, reach a positive conclusion very soon.

Library

The LNHS library, located in the Angela Marmont Centre for UK Biodiversity in the Natural History Museum, is an important resource for both the public (for reference) and LNHS members (for borrowing) providing access to a wide range of out of print and hard to find natural history titles. The library is open every Wednesday and hosted several successful field meetings making use of the facilities and specimens in collaboration with the Angela Marmont Centre. Members are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this very valuable asset. The Library Committee has reconvened after a covid-imposed absence and a new book order has been placed. Anyone who is interested in helping Leslie to keep the library open is strongly encouraged to step forward – library experience is not essential. Many thanks to Leslie Bolsover for all her hard work.

Conservation of the natural environment

Rich habitats are still under threat from developers. The Society is often asked to lend its voice to protest against such developments. Council's view is that an appropriate campaigning body in such cases is the London Wildlife Trust, the LNHS being better positioned to provide evidence-based advice if required. Our proposed partnership with GiGL will help ensure that our high-quality validated records are available for such purposes.

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