

# Kent Ornithological Society

## Minutes of the 71<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting

Held 7.30pm on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2022 (via Zoom). Attended by 31 members of the Society

### 1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Norman McCanch, Ralph and Brenda Todd and Robin Mace

### 2. President's address

Chris Cox opened the meeting, saying what a privilege it was to be president of the Society. He praised the work and dedication of officers of the Society and all those who gave up their spare time to support the important work of the KOS.

### 3. Minutes of the 70<sup>th</sup> AGM (7<sup>th</sup> April 2021)

The president invited observations on the minutes of the last meeting and asked the meeting to confirm that they were a true and accurate record.

Minutes- approved.

Chris Cox then handed over the meeting to the Society's chairman Andre Farrar.

### 4. Chairman's report.

AF outlined what a busy year it had been for the society and its officers, with a number of key projects progressing during the year. In particular he highlighted the need to replace the online sightings reporting tool to ensure that it was fully compliant with the data protection regulations. Using external support this had now been completed and work was now underway to upgrade the master database which holds all the Society's ornithological records and archive.

Other current projects included upgrading the Society's website and saving our paper records in a digital format. Meanwhile other day to day activities of the Society like recording birds and producing the annual Kent Bird Report continued as usual.

AF reported that KOS had become more engaged with other conservation bodies in Kent to represent the views of bird watchers in the county and also exploring opportunities for greater cooperation.

AF reiterated the need for volunteers to carry out these tasks. He invited the chairs of the sub-committees to provide the meeting with an update of activities in their areas.

**Chris Roome** (Membership Secretary and chair of the Membership Committee)

CR reported that membership had grown to 789 including 74 new members since January 1<sup>st</sup>. Some of this growth was probably due to providing information to paid-up members that wasn't available to non members, i.e. access to the most recent newsletter and latest bird sightings.

The Membership Committee had been established but had only met once so far. It had been set a target to get to 1,000 members as well as encouraging younger bird watchers to join.

CR expressed his frustration about the pandemic scuppering plans for a members' conference in 2020 and 2021 but the upside was some of the planned presentations had now taken place as zoom talks and we now planned to have more regular on-line talks in the future.

CR praised the work of Ray O'Reilly and Lyn Griffiths in running regular and very popular field meetings. Although these were suspended or restricted during the pandemic they were now up and running again. These were reported on the website.

CR briefly talked about plans to mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the KOS

#### **Barry Wright** (Chair of the Editorial and Records Committee)

BW reported that Martin Coath has stepped down as Area Recorder for the South area after many years service. This had led to a reorganisation of the Area Recorders reflecting their changing role now that most records are submitted electronically by the observers. BW expressed his gratitude to Chris Hindle who was now dealing with Kent Rarities, while BW now concentrated with liaison with the national bodies over British Rarities. BW noted the growth in records being submitted via eBird and the problems that this had caused with the verification of records. BW also expressed thanks on behalf of the Society to Keith Privett and Robert Carr for their continued work in producing the Kent Bird report.

#### **Murray Orchard** (Chair Conservation and Surveys Committee)

MO reported that the committee had three main areas of work i) supporting and providing data to bodies like RSPB and KWT to challenge developments that threaten wildlife habitats, ii) conservation issues and iii) surveys and monitoring. Current development concerns during the year included Swanscombe and a number of major housing and solar farm projects. With the committee's conservation remit, MO reported on work being done to identify and map important bird assemblages outside of areas with designated status. There had also been engagement with RSPB and KWT about the management of some key reserves.

MO provided an update on recent and current surveys including the Turtle Dove and breeding seabirds surveys. In addition KOS was also supporting more regular and on-going survey work done by BTO. Brian Watmough continued to liaise with the national rare breeding birds committee.

MO provided an update on recent and current surveys including the KOS Turtle Dove Survey and JNCC Seabird Count, which included a survey of our urban breeding Gulls. In addition, KOS was also supporting on-going survey work done by BTO, including the Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows Survey, coordinated by Bob Knight. Brian Watmough continued to liaise with the national Rare Breeding Birds Panel and had overseen the submission of the Kent report for 2020.

### **5. Treasurer's Report and annual accounts (Mike Henty)**

MH talked members through the accounts for the year ending Dec 2021 (copies are available on the AGM section of the KOS website).

MH reported that there was an operating deficit of £4,331. Total income was £9,843 with £8,403 from subscriptions. Expenditure amounted to £14,174 including £7,109 for the Kent Bird Report and £5,223 for work on the website and database.

MH thanked Keith Ellis for once again providing independent inspection of the accounts.

There then followed a short discussion on the level of subscriptions. The last increase was in 1997. Given that 80% of subscriptions went to the production and distribution of the Kent Bird Report there was not a lot of income remaining to supporting other activities. There was also a desire to use non subscription income, e.g. legacies etc to help support conservation projects in the county rather than subsidise the day to day running of the society.

The meeting endorsed the annual accounts and agreed that subscriptions should be increased to £15 a year from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023.

## **6. Election of officers**

The following were approved to serve for the following year.

(proposed Jane Andrews, seconded Brian Short)

Chairman:	Andre Farrar
Vice Chairman:	Chris Roome
Hon. Secretary:	Brendan Ryan
Hon. Treasurer:	Mike Henty
Membership Secretary:	Chris Roome
Chairman of Editorial & Records Sub-Committee:	Barry Wright
Chairman of Conservation & Survey's Sub-Committee:	Murray Orchard
Editor of Kent Bird Report	Keith Privett
Indoors Meetings Organiser:	Vacant
Archivist:	Robin Mace
Ordinary Member:	Keiron Palmer
Ordinary Member:	Gary Howard
Ordinary Member:	Vacant
KOS News Editor	Norman McCanch
Outdoor Meetings Organiser:	Ray O'Reilly

## **Appendix one- Chair's Introduction and review (Andre Farrar)**

At the end of my first year as chair of the executive committee I would, first of all like to thank the other members of the committee for their support, input and efforts over the last 12 months. What is always clear in a volunteer-run organisation is that we need volunteers!

There will be all sorts of opportunities to help the KOS to grow and develop in ways that could use your talents and that can be tailored to your time commitments. As you listen to the range of activities and achievements over we are reporting on in this AGM do consider if there are ways you can help.

As you will hear during the next few minutes, its been a busy and positive year for the KOS – we've established a new Membership committee and membership is heading upwards, we've been tackling the issues all organisations face in terms of upgrading our digital offer.

We had to take the sightings database offline when significant security issues were identified. While the replacement took longer than initially planned, I hope that you're happy with and making use of the replacement.

Renewing our outdated databases and significantly improving the online presence of the KOS is a top priority for us and has taken up a lot of time in the last 12 months and will continue to be a major area of work ultimately improvements to the website and the development of the Online Birds of Kent

Given KOS's role as custodian of the historical archive we're tackling the huge task of digitising the cards and paper record held by the Society so that they are secure and available for use. Once the records are safely transferred, we will be disposing of the bulk of the paper records as the cost of continued storage is not justifiable. We will, however, be extracting those records that are of historical significance including drawings and illustrations, original records of iconic birds etc, we will look to make the most of them and make them accessible in some way.

It's been a busy period for survey work, and I know many of you will have contributed directly ... and a huge thank you for stepping up, the response to our call for survey volunteers has been particularly gratifying. There will be more ... ultimately you, our membership, are the frontline of collecting the data and building our knowledge of Kent's birds and providing ammunition to help them.

A lot of the work of the KOS is organised and delivered through our committees. So first I'll hand over to Chris Roome to introduce the new Membership Committee.

### **Membership Committee**

Chair Chris Roome

Chris to cover remit of new committee, 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, membership growth, introduction of programme of Zoom meetings stimulated by our inability to hold the conference in the pandemic last year.

Also highlight the successful field trip programme acknowledging Ray and Lynne.

### **Editorial and Records Committee**

Chair Barry Wright

The committee have met three times, two by zoom and one at Dungeness Bird Observatory. A special thanks to all on the committee, the only major change is that Martin Coath and his role has been passed on now that we have three area recorders instead of four. There has been a reduction over the years of records received in paper format and the committee were no longer able to find time to enter these records, all observers now encouraged to send them electronically.

Martin's contribution over the years was greatly appreciated and we all thank him for his work and input at meetings.

Changes were made in the way we deal with county and national rarities, Chris Hindle has taken the lead on KOS rarities whilst Barry Wright deals with national rarities and communications with BBRC. A huge thanks to Chris for this, it's has helped immensely .

The issue of Ebird records continues to challenge the committee due to the number received and another source of records that requires checking.

Norman McCanch continues to compile and edit the newsletters, Robin Mace maintains the database, Alan Fossey our diligent secretary and Keith Privett the KBR.

There's many other individual to thank at so many different levels but they are all important players in KBR production and maintenance of the workings of the committee.

We continue to look at changes in the scarcity and occurrence of species within the county to maintain as accurate a representation as possible of its avifauna.

Work is ongoing with the planned digitising of the KOS archives which are fascinating to look at a and real insight into changes in our avifauna and the observers that contributed so much these past 70 plus years.

### **Conservation and Surveys committee**

Murry Orchard - chair

Met three times in the last 12 months 4 August 2021, 30 November 2021 and 3 March 2022.

The range and scale of development pressure, particularly on undesignated land, continues to grow and is a cause for concern. KOS will engage particularly where we can press to ensure that the best evidence is being used in the planning process.

We kept a watching brief on major developments especially the Lower Thames Crossing, Swanscombe's proposed theme park and the continued housing pressure around Lodge Hill. Other large-scale housing developments in Canterbury, Thanet and Westenhanger will continue to cause concern.

On Swanscombe specifically – KOS added its voice to calls to safeguard the peninsula and we welcomed the designations of the site as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The good news is that, for now, the proposal has been withdrawn.

Solar farm developments are a rising issue (in terms of location) in particular the fallout from the Cleve Hill decision as well as proposals in Aldington, Old Wives Lees and Richborough. KOS clearly recognise the scale and urgency of the climate emergency and the need for rapid deployment of renewables, but location is critical in order not to add further pressure to the county's bird populations.

Other engagements include Conyer Brickworks (housing) and the expansion of Whitstable oyster farm.

Our concerns about development pressure on undesignated land initiated work to identify important farmland areas by creating a heat map of farmland birds of conservation concern to facilitate better availability of information and data when faced with development pressure. We're now looking to expand the 'heat map' approach to all birds of conservation concern and Rare Bird Breeding panel species in Kent.

The committee have sought to engage constructively with partner organisations especially where member's concerns have been raised. We wrote to KWT with a follow up site visit at Oare Marshes to discuss concerns over water level management on the East Flood.

We have engaged with the RSPB in relation to visitor facilities at Dungeness as well as wider visitor issues on Kent reserves. We look forward to input to future plans including the design of the replacement Makepeace hide.

Disturbance to coastal birds is intense in parts of the county and we have engaged with SAMMS/Medway Council seeking to focus efforts through the BirdWise initiative at the most sensitive locations and at the critical time so the year especially for nesting birds and during the autumn passage period. We look forward to developing these ideas over the summer.

We've been getting out on the ground to see Green Recovery projects in Kent at Blean, Seasalter and Lydden Valley.

It's been a busy year for survey work with KOS taking a leading role in the national Turtle Dove survey – we achieved good coverage and now await the final population estimate but it is clear that Kent will remain the most important country for this threatened species.

The JNCC Seabird Count 2015 – 2021 finally finished including the 2019 – 2021 Urban nesting gull survey. Data for Kent has now been submitted.

The pandemic and other factors limited the coverage of the repeat Breeding Waders of Wet Meadows survey in 2021 and this has been extended to 2022.

WeBs coverage across the county has increased and the North Kent counters were able to get together for a meeting held at Elmley. And the Breeding Bird Survey continues across Kent.

The C&S committee provided input on the requirements for rebuilding the KOS sightings database.

The 2020 report for Kent's rare nesters has been submitted to the Rare Birds Breeding Panel. The 2021 report is in preparation and will include some highlights – 4 pairs of Goshawks, 6 pairs of Cattle egrets, 215 pairs of Sandwich terns and 450 pairs of Mediterranean gulls.

... we can then use this momentum to highlight both the need to ensure that our subscriptions are fully funding our core activities and reference our decision to split our budgeting into 'core' and 'projects' so, for example, that the legacies that are so generously left to use, funds raised beyond our subscriptions can be put to specific projects either within KOS or in partnership with other bodies.