

Kent Ornithological Society – Annual Report to members April 2023



Chair's Introduction - Andre Farrar

As the pressures continue to build on the natural environment and wildlife habitats in Kent, the work of KOS in recording and monitoring bird life in the county has never been as important as it is today. The records collected by our members helps build a picture of the county's avifauna and provide invaluable data to map population trends in our breeding and wintering birds. Our data is also made available to other bodies campaigning to stop inappropriate and damaging development in Kent.

For this reason it is important to have a strong KOS with members actively engaged in recording bird life in the county. One of our key goals is to ensure that the Society continues to grow and develop and remains relevant for existing and potential members. We are committed finding out what people want from KOS and developing resources that will help people get more out of their bird watching.

It has again been a busy year for the Society and we continue to make good progress in some key areas. During the last year we have:

- Become more active in engaging with other conservation bodies to ensure that a birders perspective is taken into account when decisions are made about the management and facilities of local reserves in the county
- Increased our membership to over 800
- Completed the transfer of old paper records dating back to the early 1950s to a digital format preserving them for future use
- Seen an increase in the use of our new sightings database through which members and others can report the birds they see. We have decided that the most recent sightings on the website can only be seen by members and this has contributed to a



surge in new membership. We are looking at developing the members' only area of the website to help encourage more people to join the society.

- Once again produced a high quality annual Bird Report, covering 2020, while work on the 2021 report is nearly completed
- Made good progress in replacing our old master data base where we keep all our current records. We are in the final testing phase and anticipate that the new system can be used in the production of the 2022 Kent Bird Report.
- Run a successful series of on line talks throughout the winter
- Continued to run popular monthly outdoor field meetings throughout the year
- Undertaken our first survey of members since 2010
- Produced six high quality newsletters during the year
- Sought to improve our communication, expanding our use of social media, using twitter more effectively and starting to use Instagram
- Celebrated the 70th edition of the Kent Bird Report by providing members with a reproduction of the first report from 1952
- Donated £5,000 to help improve viewing for visiting bird watchers at Dungeness RSPB reserve
- Raised the profile of KOS in the local media with coverage of our Turtle Dove and Nightingale surveys

Like many organisations we have been facing rising costs in recent years. Sharp increases in the cost of postage meant that it ceased to be economical to continue to produce and distribute hard copies of our newsletter a few years ago. Similar challenges face the production and distribution of the Kent Bird Report but we felt that most of the membership would want this to continue in its hard copy format for some years to come. It has meant we have had to increase subscription rates from £12 to £15. This is the first increase in subscriptions in 25 years! While this is a very modest increase it has been challenging for our Membership Secretary chasing members to amend their standing orders.

Once again we are indebted all the volunteers that have made invaluable contributions to the Society's work over the last year. Those who have contributed in a more formal way are noted at the end of the report but we are also extremely grateful to all our members that submitted their bird sightings to the Society and to all those people who undertook survey work during the year.



The running of the Society and its activities is undertaken by three main sub-committees, Editorial and Records; Conservation and Surveys; and Engagement. A brief summary of their work during the last year is described here.

Editorial and Records Committee Chair Barry Wright

The Editorial and Records Committee is responsible for ensuring that the county has a reliable record of the birds recorded in Kent each year and maintaining a robust archive of ornithological data which describes the changing status of bird species in the county. The committee is responsible for assessing records of scarce and rare birds and liaising through the County Recorder with the British Birds Rarities Committee.

During the last year the committee has met twice via Zoom. With the increase in records submitted the task of ensuring all records received via different formats are included in the database has led to more work. Ebird continues to grow in popularity as a reporting tool and observers are encouraged to use either that, the online KOS database or Birdtrack to ensure their sightings become part of the county records. Alternatively observers can send a spreadsheet in a format that can be uploaded by the Area Recorder. We actively encourage observers to submit all their records as pressure on habitats in Kent continues. In conjunction with Andrew Henderson historical records are looked at periodically to maintain the KOS database and be as accurate as possible. The list of species requiring supporting documentation to be provided for publication in the Kent Bird Report is constantly under review based on changes in status.

Conservation and Surveys Committee Chair Murray Orchard

The Conservation and Surveys Committee includes members from other conservation bodies and organisations working in Kent. Its principle role to co-ordinate both the regular surveys that take place year-on-year along with the special one off survey projects. The committee also keeps a watching brief on significant development proposals that might have an impact on birds and important habitats in the county. The Committee liaises with bodies like the RSPB and Kent Wildlife Trust to ensure that data is available to help

challenge any inappropriate development. The committee also provides a point of contact with the BTO and the national Rare Birds Breeding Panel.

During the last year the committee has met three times. Key activities and areas of consideration have included:

- Liaising with RSPB & KWT over development threats, including Swanscombe, Lodge Hill, Old Park, Betteshanger, various major solar farms, National Grid onshore cables
- Reporting on findings of 2021 Turtle Dove survey
- Completing JNCC Seabird Count
- Organising 2023 Nightingale survey
- Reviewing BBS and WeBS coverage
- Submitting the 2021 Kent Rare Breeding Bird Report
- Meeting with KWT to discuss the reintroduction of Choughs to Kent
- Visits to RSPB reserves at Seasalter and Lydden Valley (Worth Marshes) to view habitat management
- Visits to some North Kent sites with an RSPB ecologist discuss potential future management.



Engagement Committee Chair Chris Roome

This committee was recently established to replace the Membership Committee. The main focus of the committee is the communication between the Society and its members and how we can encourage greater participation in bird watching in the county and by implication increase the membership of the KOS. The committee is also charged with ensuring that the membership of the Society better reflects the diversity of people involved in bird watching in the county. The remit of the committee includes the website, our social media communications and events like the conference, field meetings and online talks.

In the short time the committee has been in existence it has organised (thanks to Martin Collins) a new survey of members, the results of which will be considered at the next



meeting when we will look at further small surveys to dig deeper into members' views and what they would like to see for the future of their Society. The committee has also sought to raise the KOS profile on social media with more regular messages and better coordination between the different platforms which now includes Instagram. We are also exploring how to expand the very popular programme of outdoor meetings to give greater opportunities for beginners to be guided by experienced birders with good local knowledge of their patch.

Acknowledgements

All the work of the Society is undertaken by volunteers. We would like to thank the following for their contribution during the year.

Newsletter Editor: Norman McCanch

Field Meeting Organiser: Ray O'Reilly and Lyn Griffiths

Kent Bird Report team: Keith Privett (Editor). Writers: Geoff Burton, Heather Chantler, Martin Coath, Paul Dietrich, Andrew Henderson, Mike Henty, Chris Hindle, Nigel Jarman, Bob Knight, Murray Orchard, Brendan Ryan, Martin Sutherland, and Brian Watmough. Other contributors: Robert Carr, Neil Davies, Paul Jackson, Andrew Lipczynski, Norman McCanch, Stephen Message, Jan Pritchard, Derek Smith, and Barry Wright.

County Recorder: Barry Wright

Conservation and Surveys Committee: Murray Orchard (chairman), Brian Watmough (Rare Breeding Birds Panel Representative), Bob Knight (BTO representative), Alan Johnson (RSPB), Nicole Khan (RSPB), Nicky Britton-Williams (KWT), Andre Farrar, Martin Sutherland, Steffan Walton, Simon Ginnaw, John Young, Robin Mace, Heather Mathieson, Chas Holt

Editorial and Records Committee: Barry Wright (Chairman), Alan Fossey (Secretary), Robin Mace (archivist), John Clements, Steffan Walton, Dave Walker, Chris Hindle, Richard Collins, Matt Hindle, Ray O'Reilly, Andy Appleton, David Smith (eBird moderator), Keith Privett (KBR editor)

Area Recorders: Geoff Burton, Jack Chantler, Mike Puxley, Chris Hindle (ringing)

Facebook moderators: Barry Wright, Brendan Ryan

Engagement Committee: Chris Roome (Chair), Martin Collins, Jack Farrar, Nicola Khan, Heather Mathieson, Kieron Palmer, Brendan Ryan

Executive Committee: Andre Farrar (Chairman), Chris Roome, (Vice Chairman & Membership Secretary), Mike Henty (Treasurer), Brendan Ryan (Secretary), Martin Collins, Gary Howard, Robin Mace, Murray Orchard, Kieron Palmer, Keith Privett, Barry Wright

