

Kent Ornithological Society

Executive Committee – Draft Minutes

18th September 2019

Present: Martin Coath (Chair), Mike Henty, Andre Farrar, Keith Privett, Martin Warburton, Ray O’Rielly, Barry Wright

Apologies: Chris Roome, Norman McCanch, Murray Orchard

1. Key matters for decision or discussion

1.1 Bough Beech reserve and visitor centre

MW reported that KWT had already stopped using the visitor centre at Bough Beech and were likely to give up the lease of the centre and nature reserve in the near future. There was concern that other interests like fishing would fill the gap to the detriment of the bird watching opportunities at the reservoir.

The Committee discussed at length the opportunities for KOS to take over the management of these assets and considered the risks and liabilities of such a venture. It was felt that the Society should steer clear of any involvement in the visitor centre but that it should support the local bird watching community to preserve in some form the nature reserve. It was agreed that MW and MC would draft a letter to be sent to the water company expressing our concerns about the future of the reserve and exploring collaboration in the management of the reserve in the future.

Action: MC/MW to draft a letter to water company and circulate to the committee for comment

1.2 Incentives for young people

The committee had previously discussed how to engage with younger bird watchers when discussing discounted membership for people under 18.

It was agreed that the Committee made up of mostly middle aged men was not in a position to prescribe what young people might need from the Society. Instead it was suggested that we need a project to engage with younger members and find out how they wanted to use and support the Society. It was agreed that we would host an event/workshop bringing together some younger birders in the county to allow them to say what they wanted or needed.

It was suggested that Simon Ginnaw should be approached to facilitate such an event and an initial budget of £200 was allocated to help with the cost of the event including transport costs to help young people get to the event.

Action: BW to discuss with Simon Ginnaw

1.3 Shelagh Durbridge legacy

The Treasurer reported that the Society had received a legacy from the estate of Shelagh Durbridge worth £13,949. A number of suggestions had been made on how this money might be used.

It was agreed that consideration on how to use the legacy money would be deferred until after the costs of the data base replacement were known

1.4 KOS data base and archive

KP & AF provided an update on the project. Some clarity is now beginning to emerge on what was required. The Executive Committee were asked to support two work streams. i) Taking over the hosting of the open data base that can be accessed and viewed on the KOS website; ii) Developing a specification for a database to replace Cobra.

Draft minutes of working group provided by CR are appended to these minutes.

The Committee endorsed the actions proposed by the working group in respect of externally hosted database and replacement of Cobra

1.5 Facebook

The Committee discussed at length two issues raised by the Society's Facebook moderator Steve Wood, namely the use of Facebook by committee members and how to deal posts to the page that promote controversial and often acrimonious debates especially often linked to conflicting attitudes towards shooting. It was agreed that it was important for people involved in the Society post to the page to ensure that the tone and content continues to be pitched at the right level being reasonably serious and informative. It was recognised that some members of the Executive Committee did not engage with social media and it was difficult for these members to contribute. However members of the sub-committees and area recorders should also be encouraged to post more to the Facebook page.

With regard to controversial postings, the excellent work done by Steve Wood in moderating the page was recognised by the Committee. The Facebook page was a valuable asset for the Society that allowed information to be communicated to members and for members to interact and get involved. It was important to avoid the problems that afflicted both KOSnet and the KOS Forum. There were concerns that barring some members from posting on the site might have other adverse consequences. The committee did agree that as a matter of policy the KOS is neither for nor against shooting whatever the views of individuals who make up the various committees of the Society. It was accepted that we have lost members as a result of not adopting a strong anti-shooting policy. With regard to Facebook, experience has shown that airing views on such matters via social media creates more heat than light, does nothing to change entrenched views and alienates those who might be open to a balanced discussion. It was agreed that any posts on this subject should be removed immediately by the moderator. It was also agreed that the KOS Facebook page is not the appropriate forum for individuals to criticise the actions of conservation organisations with which we work and such posts would also be removed. This is in line with the existing published guidelines for the KOS Facebook page.

It was agreed that any postings that relate to the rights or wrongs of shooting should be removed immediately (rather than simply ending the thread). The committee delegates full discretion in these matters to the moderator(s).

1.6 Membership Survey

It was agreed that a fresh membership survey should be done, using an online tool like Survey Monkey. However we need to decide what information we needed from members and what questions needed to be asked.

Action: BR to prepare discussion paper for next meeting

1.7 Turtle Dove Survey

Since Kent is the UK stronghold of the country's fastest declining bird, it was suggested that we should seek to establish a better understanding of the numbers and distribution of the species in the county. AF pointed out that there are a number of organisations now working on rescue plans for Turtle Doves and while monitoring was important, it should be done in conjunction with other interested parties.

It was suggested that as well as the ornithological value of a county wide survey, it provided a good public engagement exercise to raise the profile of KOS within the county.

Action: AF to discuss options in conjunction with the Conservation & Surveys sub-committee with Alan Johnson and Nicole Khan

2. Updates

2.1 Kent Bird Report

Most parts of 2017 report completed but still waiting for some species accounts to be done. Best case scenario was that it might be with printers within a month.

Jack Chantler had indicated that he intended to step down from his role coordinating the species account writers. BR suggested that there was a lack of appreciation on just how much work had been undertaken by Jack and Ken Lodge editing the species accounts.

2.2 Treasurer's Report

MH reported that the Society's accounts remained in a strong position and there were no significant issues to report

2.3 Conservation and Surveys sub committee

MO provided a written update in his absence.

Developments: No updates on Lodge Hill or Lower Thames Crossing. Deadline passed for Cleve Hill hearings, several huge housing developments proposed in central Kent -

Conservation issues: RSPB continuing interest and support for island restoration in the Medway, woodland group being established (Simon Ginnaw lead) to help align woodland commercial clearances with interest of key species such as Nightjar and Tree Pipit etc.

BTO & Surveys: Bob Knight has taken on supervision of BBS but not full Regional Rep position which remains vacant. In reality the job has been broken down with BBS, Heronry Census and WeBS being coordinated separately. The main tasks of Regional Rep not being fulfilled is BTO promotion and membership support. No BTO surveys are currently planned for this winter. JNCC Seabird Count (urban nesting Gulls) good coverage of some areas eg Faversham-Thonet, Canterbury and

Folkestone but some major gaps to fill, namely Dover, Ashford, and Thames towns (Dartford-Gravesend). 2020 is final year of survey.

RBBP. 2018 KOS data has been received by Brian Watmough and a meeting is planned soon to discuss write-up of species. Aiming to submit by end of October. Proposed survey of Turtle Dove to raise awareness of species/get members involved with survey activity and help produce county population estimate for RBBP. National Honey Buzzard survey next year (2020).

2.4 Editorial and Records committee

BW provided an update. The committee had considered the problem of storage of old paper records. The preference of the committee was to digitalise and retain the records but decision was being passed back to the Exec Committee. Company likely to be used for scanning is tied up with another project for next year although KOS have a lot of preparation work to do before that can happen. Working party needed to sort through paper records.

Cattle Egret and White Stork have been removed as species requiring descriptions

2.5 Newsletter

NMc provided a written update in his absence. First full year of six editions of newsletters will be completed in November. Seems to be more contributions from members coming forward. Paid advert included in recent edition raising £120. Information from MO and Brian Watmough on surveys has been very useful.

2.6 Membership

CR provided a written update. Current membership stands at a little over 710. This is the stubborn average! This year 37 new members have been recruited so far, a better rate than in past years, but membership remains low considering the numbers of regular birders in the County.

2.7 Outdoor meetings

Continue to go well and develop. RO'R appreciative of support from former organiser Mike Roser. A number of issues like parking and poor maintenance of reserves etc are making outdoor meetings more challenging

3. Administrative matters

3.1 Minutes of previous meeting (15th May 2019)

Agreed

3.2 Dates of meetings 2020

Executive Committee: Wednesday 29th January, 20th May, 2nd September

AGM: 13th April

3.3 Date and time of next meeting 29th Jan 2020 7.00pm

3.4 Agenda items for next meeting

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-Membership survey- draft questions

-Driven grouse shooting/Bird of prey persecution/shooting- policy statement

-Retention of old paper records

Appendix one: Draft minutes of Data Review Group

Minutes of the Meeting of the Data Review Group* 11th September 2019 at 7.30pm - Ashford International Hotel.

- Members of the Group: Chris Roome [CR]; Murray Orchard [MO]; Jack Chantler [JC]; Andre Farrar [AF]; Keith Privett [KP]; Robin Mace [RM]; Brian Watmough; [BW]; Alan Fossey [AF]; (Barry Wright - County Recorder - is kept informed as to progress).

Present at the meeting: CR; Alan Fossey; Claire and Andre Farrar; KP; RM; MO.

Apologies: BW; JC.

The meeting discussed two issues facing KOS with regard to data management in the future. These two issues are; 1) the existing Kent Datas Base and, 2) the need to replace Cobra as the program for sorting, storing and retrieving KOS records.

1. Existing Kent Data Base. (KDB)

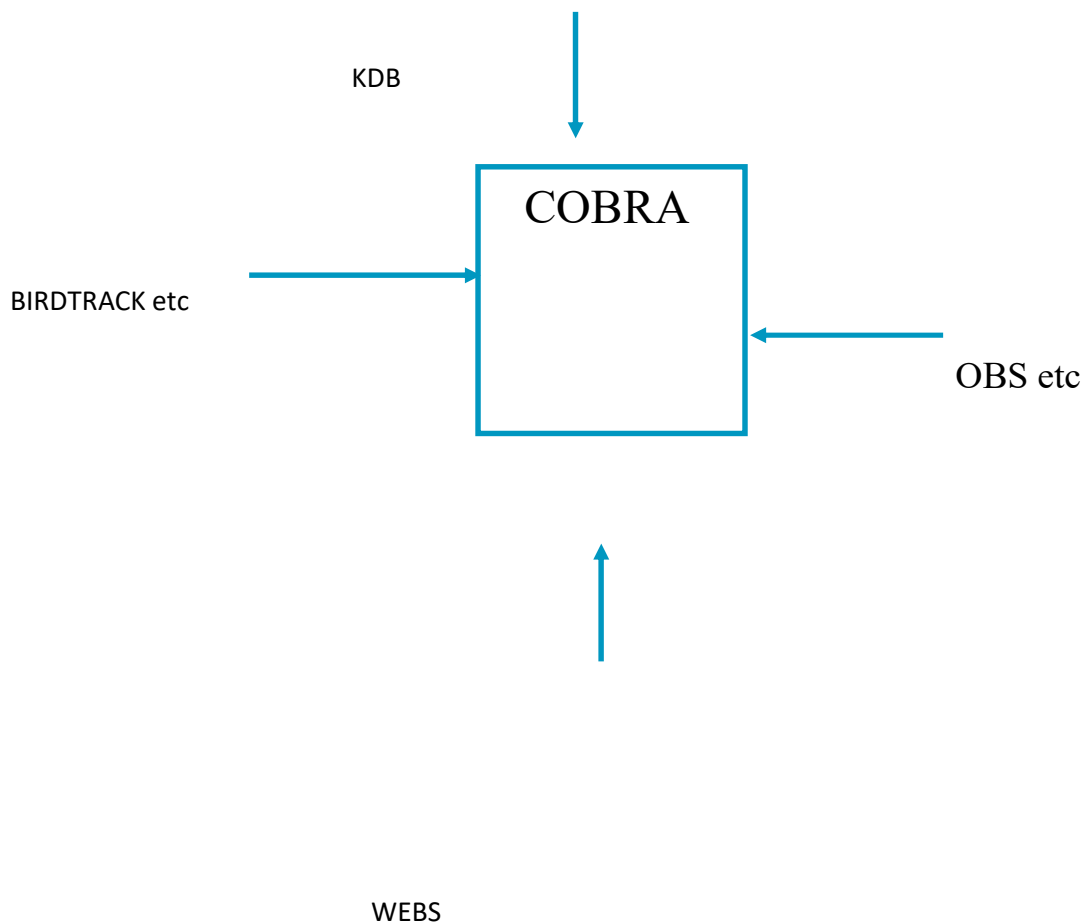
- The KDB - originally set up some years ago - is hosted on a computer in Essex and is maintained by Paul Griggs for a small annual fee. (Over the years Paul has done an excellent job and RM speaks highly of his efficiency and skill.
- It was agreed by the DRG at this meeting that KOS should plan to **move** the Kent Data Base and store it - probably on the 'cloud' and linked to the KOS website.
- This process will need careful planning and will need to be carried out by individuals with extensive IT knowledge and skills. It may be appropriate to pay a consultant to carry out this work.
- The DRG is wary of assigning a date for this process to be completed but nevertheless this is a task that needs to be accomplished soon and the KOS exec is asked to consider commissioning the DRG to get this task underway as a first important step into the overhaul of the KOS data systems that it was asked to review.

Action: KOS Exec

- CR is to discuss the process further with Michael Bennett to define more closely what is possible with regard to linking KDB to our website and of course bringing it fully back into the County and under our control. **Action: CR**

2. Replacing COBRA

- COBRA is a program used by RM to sort out all bird sighting data received from a variety of sources - including KDB. The program is old, increasingly incompatible with modern devices and programs and requires considerable “tweaking” by RM - including writing programs - to make the task of sorting our data needed for the KBR and our national commitments - Rare Birds Breeding Panels, County Recorders etc more time consuming and difficult.



- It is the agreed position of the DRG that COBRA must be replaced. This will require the creation of a tool that needs clearly defined functions. It is essential that before any commissioning of a program to replace COBRA the Society is clear about what it wants the program to do.
- Clear advice was shared at the DRG meeting that the replacement program will only be as good as the brief that KOS provides for its replacement. This will require key individuals to list what they would **need** from the replacement program in order to carry out their society functions. KP - editor of KBR, MO - Chair of Conservation and Surveys, both present at the meeting, agreed to list

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their respective needs as soon as possible and forward them to CR, and it was also agreed that AF would contact Barry Wright the County Recorder in order for him to do the same. MO would discuss this too with BW for the views of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel.

Action: KP; MO, AF.

- In the course of the discussions the updated version of *Wildlife Recorder 4* was mentioned and especially its links with the Lincolnshire Bird Club. It was agreed that contact be made with Lincs to discuss their decision to use Wildlife Recorder as their main program for bird data. In addition AF and RM would examine the program more closely. **Action: RM, AF.**
- Claire Farrar also suggested that the national database for biological records be examined to assess what contribution it could make to our search for a COBRA replacement.
- It was agreed that members of the committee should continue to think hard about existing members of KOS with appropriate skills to be approached by CR to try and find more volunteers to work with the data in the future. We are really grateful that Claire has expressed an interest in taking on some part of this task. **Action : ALL**
- The DRG group stresses that we have now reached a starting point in this process. The exec should also be aware that there are likely to be financial costs associated with this project.

CR - 11/9/19