

LONDON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
Registered Charity 206228

Report of the society for the year ending 30 June 2024

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 handing over to Lydia Gallyer-Barnett, & Secretary Annie Wilson), up to ten members' representatives – Liz Andrew, Robin Blades, Noel Brock, Jan Hewlett, Wendy Knight, Cassandra Lee, Joanne Maddox, Pete Mantle and Ian Woodward - and one representative of each of the Society's sections – Cecilia Derrick (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. Council would like to acknowledge Michael Wilsdon's hard work to fill the gaps left by this vacancy and keep the society running. This year the Society is very sorry to say goodbye - and a huge thank you - to Catherine Schmitt, Publications Secretary, and Mike West, Treasurer, who have both served the society for many years. We are extremely keen to fill all the Society's vacancies, so please seriously consider joining us to keep your Society going. We are looking for people with a range of skills and interests - 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 continues to soldier away in the background managing our membership. The Library Committee has reconvened following relaxation of Covid restrictions and Michael Wilsdon has restarted the Publications Committee to guide the imminent LNHS publications.

The Trustees would like to thank the army of volunteers who support the Society for their contributions and on-going commitment.

As work patterns have not returned to the pre-covid norm a lot of society business continues to be conducted using Zoom technology.

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 Virtual Talks team who facilitate and support the talks.

A full and varied programme of field meetings was offered throughout the year. The walks across all sections of the society have been 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 102, edited by Clive Herbert, was distributed to members in November 2023. It comprised annual reports from officers and articles of interest covering natural history of the London area contributed by members. Many thanks to the contributors and editorial team who continue to produce a high-quality journal of which the Society is proud.

The London Bird Report No 87 for the year 2022 was published in May 2024. This annual publication is a well-regarded high-quality record of London's bird observations for 2022. Many thanks to the numerous individuals who contribute significant time and effort to its production.

Thanks as always go to Mark Burgess and contributors for the quarterly Newsletter which continues to provide members with regular news on the activities and operation of the Society. We encourage all members, old and new, to consider submitting items for publication.

Many thanks to Amy Muiyui Lui for managing the production of the bi-annual programme of events. Family commitments mean that Amy has had to step down from this role but we are very grateful to Noel Brock who has taken over the task.

Leslie Williams (LNHS Butterfly Recorder) is nearing publication through NatureBureau 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 has been reconvened to manage these imminent publications and help bring them to fruition.

We thank all of 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

98 new members joined the society during the membership year ending 30/09/2024, down 31 on the previous year. The total membership for the year was 963, down from 997.

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 some cases over many decades: Mr Leslie Brockington (1958), Mr Steve Chastell (2010), Mr Christopher Ennis (1983) and Mr John Evans (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), has now completed the survey phase. A six-month extension to the grant has been awarded to allow time for data analysis and report writing based on the plant, fungi and lichen surveys. The Nature's Calendar phenology part of the project will be continued by the Hampstead-based charity Heath Hands and their volunteers.

After much discussion, the Council signed a data sharing agreement with GiGL (Greenspace Information for Greater London) in March 2024. We look forward to a productive relationship with GiGL - members will be able to take advantage of the large data sets now available.

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 one Saturday per month, thanks to

Leslie Bolsover, the Librarian, and James Lovely and Ron Dionne. The library has 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 interested in helping Leslie to keep the library open is strongly encouraged to step forward – library experience is not essential.

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 partnership with GiGL will help ensure that our high-quality validated records are widely available for such purposes.

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