

**MINUTES**  
**Oxford Ornithological Society Annual General Meeting**

14th May 2014, 19:45 – 20:30  
Stratfield Brake, Kidlington

The meeting was attended by approximately 48 members and was chaired by Sir Clive Elliott.

**1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from Keith Clack.

**2. President's opening remarks**

Clive Elliott welcomed those present and thanked them attending before declaring the meeting open.

**3. Minutes of 2013 Annual General Meeting**

Acceptance of the minutes was proposed by George Candelin and seconded by Jon Uren. The minutes were approved by Clive Elliott.

**4. Matters arising**

It was announced that OOS meetings will be held at Exeter Hall, Kidlington from September 2014. Kidlington Parish Council is planning to sell the clubhouse to a private company and does not want any ongoing commitments to external organisations.

**5. Secretary's report**

Barry Hudson presented the Secretary's report for 2013 - 2014. A full version of the report is appended.

**6. Treasurer's report**

Eric Dunford presented the Treasurer's report for 2013 - 2014. A full version of the report is appended and a copy of the accounts is also attached as a separate document.

A question was raised about the relative hire costs of Exeter Hall compared with Stratfield Brake. It was confirmed that Exeter Hall will cost more, but that is offset by the reduced need for the Society to invest in improved audio-visual equipment.

Acceptance of the accounts was proposed by Ray Bellis and seconded by Roy Overall. The accounts were accepted unanimously by those present.

Jon Uren was proposed as the auditor for 2014 – 2015 by Graham Coleman and seconded by Barry Hudson. Jon Uren was elected unanimously by those present.

**7. Conservation Officer's report**

Alan Larkman presented the Conservation Officer's report for 2013 - 2014. A full version of the report is appended.

**8. Resignations and election of Committee members**

It was noted that Barry Hudson intends to resign as Secretary to the OOS. Members were asked for nominations to be submitted. Clive Elliott observed that Barry Hudson has made a huge contribution to the OOS and he will be much missed by the other Committee members.

There were no resignations from the Committee for the coming year and no nominations have been received. The current Committee members were elected unanimously.

**9. Other matters for discussion submitted in advance**

None were received.

**10. Any Other Business**

None.

**11. Chairman's closing address**

There was a brief discussion about recruitment and attendance by younger members. It was noted that efforts have been made to encourage students from the EGI to attend, and some have done so. However, attendance levels remain low.

Clive Elliott thanked the members of the Committee for their help in running the OOS.

The AGM was declared closed.

## Oxford Ornithological Society Secretary's Report AGM 2013-2014 Season.

Wednesday 14th May held at Stratfield Brake Kidlington.

Last year I began my report commenting on the venue of Stratfield Brake, and I quote, "previous problems are now a thing of the past". I am afraid I spoke too soon, because we have recently learnt of the intention of our landlords the Kidlington Parish Council, and their Exeter Hall representatives, to offer the loss making Stratfield Brake hall to privatisation, and as a consequence not offer the OOS this facility in case our usage hinders any negotiations they may enter into with third parties. This shocking news would not have been too much of a problem if we had been informed in plenty of time, but unfortunately with our next season's programme already printed, we have been left with the problem of finding an alternative venue. Fortunately the Kidlington Parish Council have available another venue that is familiar to many of us namely Exeter Hall Kidlington, the present site for our Bernard Tucker Memorial Lecture. Our chairman, Dr. Alan Larkman, has managed to secure the dates we require at this site. Alan and I will be visiting Exeter Hall in the near future with a view of assessing the seating and stage arrangements and hopefully making this large hall a little more "homely"; we will also be looking at the catering set up to ensure we can continue to enjoy our beverage and biscuit breaks. Please accept my apologies for any inconvenience you feel may result from these hastily made changes but your committee will do its very best to make Exeter Hall usage as smooth as possible. With the programme already printed we intend to place a sticker with the new address over the old one in order to minimise any confusion.

I now come to the part of my report I most value that is the thanking of all those members who so selflessly give their time and talents on behalf of the OOS. Firstly thank you to Marie Therese Elliott and Rosemary Lenton for their superb efforts at our indoor meetings with the beverage/biscuit break. I wish to thank Ian Lewington and his team of some twenty species authors for the work they all put in on the Annual Report with special mention of Graham Coleman for his chivvy and cajoling, thereby catching up previously lost ground to the extent that I understand we can look forward to the 2010 issue this year, special mention also is due to Bob Pomphret who has helped Ian considerably by taking over design aspects of the report giving Ian more time to concentrate on the editing. Ian is also due our gratitude for his continuing work as editor of the Bulletin and asks me to pass on his gratitude all those people who send him photographs. Ray Bellis our webmaster is to be congratulated for his ongoing work making the OOS site ever more accessible. BTO rep. John Melling works so hard to involve us in important bird surveys so please continue to support John's efforts by responding positively to his requests for

involvement. Database manager and society auditor Jon Uren deserves and receives our gratitude for the very important work he undertakes on behalf of our society. I thank Janet Person for the arduous task she regularly takes on mailing out the Bulletin. Our appreciation to Keith Clack for his literary contributions to the Oxford Times although our usual income from this source is down this year due to your secretary not able to meet some deadlines. The Oxford Blog site continues to inform birders and we thank Adam Hartley and Jason Copock for their efforts on our behalf. Indoor Meetings Secretary Graham Lenton again presents us with an interesting array of new season talks ranging from the tracking of cuckoos and nightjars to the fascinating study of corvid intelligence. Field trips led by Steve Alley will this year take participating members from Climping in West Sussex to the more familiar home territory of the Wantage area.

The society in partnership with The Ashmolean Natural History Society staged the BTML talk by Dr Tim Birkhead and this well attended and interesting lecture now at Exeter Hall is turning previous losses into profit and has vindicated our change of venue for this important event. Our President Sir Clive Elliott is also our Patchwork Co-ordinator and is always looking for members to write up a familiar and interesting habitat.

As a society we enjoy access usually through individual members to tracts of ground not normally available to the general public and I thank all those landowners and farmers that not only give us access but actively encourage our conservation efforts.

Finally I wish to let you all know that it is my intention to stand down from my position of secretary in the near future due to the increasing demands on my time emanating from the duties I have undertaken on behalf of my Brother in Law who suffers dementia. I hope someone will come forward soon in order for me to work with you and help you fit smoothly into the role.

Barry Hudson (secretary)

## **TREASURERS REPORT 2013/14**

**Section A1 Receipts** Income was much the same as last year despite the membership income falling. We now have 287 members (48 of whom are family members) which is a net drop of 12 on the year. Donations increased further because refreshments were provided for a complete year's meetings.

**Section A2 Payments** Expenditure this year reverted to the levels of previous years. Hire of the hall was the same as the previous year, after allowance for late invoices in 12/13, while the speaker Fees reverted to the budgeted figure. Two Annual Reports were produced at £1,500 each, which also increased the postage. After allowing for credits and debits (including provision for future Annual Reports), the balance in hand decreased by £1k, reversing the unexpected surplus of the previous year.

**Section B** The Conservation/Fieldwork fund benefitted again from Oxford Times payments for monthly articles, grants from TOE and Smiths, and a donation from a member. £5.5k remains in hand.

**13/14 Budget** The Committee has agreed a Budget for 2014/5. With £10,000 in hand the Committee felt that it should continue to absorb increased costs of meetings and bulletins for the current year without increasing Subscriptions for the coming year. However, the Committee believes that an increase is very likely to be required in 2015/16

Finally, many thanks to Jon Uren for carrying out the duties of Independent Examiner so cheerfully.

**Oxford Ornithological Society  
Conservation Report, May 2014**

I would like to give just a brief update on our ongoing conservation activities during the past year and, in particular, to take the opportunity to thank the people who have given so generously of their time, effort, and in some cases, money, to enable things to happen. I won't say much about the Tree Sparrow project, because Clive will be talking more about that later in the evening. As many of you will know, we provide food at a large number of feeding stations throughout the year, which requires a considerable week-in, week-out effort in all weathers. I would particularly like to thank Barry Hudson, Clive Elliott, Sally Taylor, Albert Allen, and Martin Corley who have maintained this effort over a number of years, and to the various farmers and landowners who support the project. Thanks also to Bill Haynes, who is a relative newcomer to the project, and who has been handling the sites around Buscot, at the western end of the project area. Several people have contributed financially, but special thanks are due to an anonymous donor for their considerable generosity which is much appreciated. Breeding success was pretty mixed last year, and looks to be heading that way again this year. One thing we have learned is that it only seems to take one thoroughly wet day to trigger a round of Tree Sparrow brood failures.

Our winter ground-feeding programme was especially challenging this year, with some of our best sites being either inaccessible or actually submerged due to flooding for long periods. My own site at Meadow Farm went under water on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December and did not reappear until the 10<sup>th</sup> of March. However, one way and another feeding a combination of Rapeseed, Linseed and Millet on the ground succeeded in attracting good numbers of Linnets, Reed Buntings, Yellowhammers and Bullfinches which lifted the gloom caused by the wettest winter for over 200 years.

For the past several years, the Society has provided modest financial support to Pat Wixey for his work on Barn Owls, and Andrew Freeman for his work with Hobbies. Pat reports that the Barn Owls had another pretty poor breeding season in 2013, with many pairs delaying their breeding to avoid the worst of the wet weather. Pat and his team made a total of 220 site visits to 190 different sites last year. Barn Owl pairs bred successfully at 15 of those sites, producing a total of 45 owlets with a largest individual brood of 5. A further 29 sites were occupied by pairs or single adults which apparently did not breed. The floods of last winter will not have helped overwinter survival, but as Pat's team have been cleaning out the boxes ready for the current season they have found adults in residence, so perhaps not too many adults have been lost. Pat would like to thank the Society for its support and also Ian Anderson and Albert Allen for all their hard work.

Andrew Freeman is a tree surgeon by profession, which comes in handy for monitoring Hobby nests! He works in both Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, and our funding goes some way towards supporting his work in Oxon. Last summer he monitored 6 Hobby nests in Oxfordshire. Of these, 5 pairs bred successfully and produced a total of 11 fledglings, which is a similar total to last year. Andrew works mainly on his own, and expressed his thanks to the Society for support. This year, the support we could offer to Pat and Andrew was boosted by an anonymous donation, for which we are very grateful. As in previous years, I should stress that the money we provide for conservation projects does not come from the Society's General Fund,

which derives from members' subscriptions, but from a separate Conservation Fund that is kept afloat by donations and income from the regular articles contributed to the Oxford Times by Barry Hudson and Keith Clack.

One conservation project that (so far at least) has not cost the Society any money is our work with City Farm near Eynsham, which is farmed using methods more typical of the 1950s rather than the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I have the strong belief that our resident seed-eating farmland birds used to depend very heavily on the seed supply provided by arable weeds, and City Farm has proved to be an outstanding site for arable weeds! The plant conservation charity, Plantlife International, operates a points scoring scheme for ranking arable farmland sites. The various plant species growing at a site are scored from 0 to 10 according to their rarity and conservation status – to calibrate that, '9' is reserved for critically endangered species, and to score a '10' the species must have been officially declared extinct in the UK and have re-appeared at the site of its own accord! The threshold for a site of national importance is a combined total of 35 points, while the threshold for an internationally important site is 70 points or more. City Farm boasts some very special species including an '8' and a couple of '7s' and '6s', as well as several less important ones, giving a current total of 46 points. So, after only 3 years, the site is well above the threshold for national importance, and I very much have my eye on the threshold for international importance for a couple of years' time. It's also ranked as close to SSSI level for its insect fauna. City Farm already attracts large flocks of Linnets and Yellowhammers in winter, and I'm hopeful that the numbers will increase further as the soil seed bank builds up. At a personal level, the highlight of my year at City Farm was the day I spent there with Professor Ian Newton last July. In spite of a) it raining, and b) his car breaking down, we had a wonderful day, and I'm really grateful for his enthusiasm and support for the project.

They say you should always end on a high note, but I'm going to end with a low one. The agreement by all the main political parties that what our countryside needs most is the building of huge numbers of new houses, businesses and roads means that wildlife habitats are coming under ever-increasing pressure, especially in the south of England. Worst of all, recent alterations to the planning regulations and procedures mean that there is less and less that anyone can do about it. I fear that the next few years will see massive changes to the Oxfordshire landscape, and not many of them will be for the better.

Alan Larkman  
May 2014