



THE MAGPIE

April 2017

The Newsletter of the Milton Keynes Natural History

Update on MKNHS events and activities to celebrate MK50

As you know, Milton Keynes Natural History Society is celebrating MK50 with a number of special events and activities which are open to everyone, but of course we hope they will be well-supported by our members. Put the dates in your diaries!

Milton Keynes Festival of Nature 1-8 July 2017

This is a special week-long programme of activities to celebrate the amazing range of wildlife found in the green spaces of Milton Keynes. The Society is one of the partners in the organisation of this festival.

In particular, the Society will be participating in the **Nature Day on Saturday 1 July at Howe Park Wood** where there will be a range of nature-based activities for all the family. Successful days have been held at Howe Park for the past two years and have a special significance for the Society in commemorating Bernhard Frewin, one of our founder members.



We will be opening our Tuesday evening walk during the Festival to the wider public. This is at **Willen Lake, 7pm on 4 July.**

A major Society event will be the **Photographic Exhibition: The Wildlife of Milton Keynes** to be held from **30 June- 30 July at the Central Library, First Floor**

This will be an exhibition of photographs taken by members of the Society, showcasing the wonderful range of wildlife that can be seen in and around Milton Keynes throughout the year. There is still time to send in your photos, particularly if you have taken anything on the list circulated by Paul (owl, bat, fish, otter, fungi, trees, plants (including trees), wildflowers, mole, badger, stoat, other small mammals, cormorant, gosander, waders, kingfisher, hedgehog, birds in flight). Send him your high quality jpeg files by the end of April.

Finally, we will be adding three downloadable **Self-Guided Nature Walks**, for Walton Lake, Tattenhoe and the Blue Lagoon, to the Society website, linked to the Wildlife Sites page.

Linda Murphy

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| President | Roy Maycock |
| Vice-President | John C Wickham Martin Kincaid |
| Chair | Julie Lane Linda Murphy |
| Treasurer | Joe Clinch |
| Secretary: | Steve Brady |
| Committee: | Arthur Allen Jean Cooke Paul Lund Peter Hassett Mary Sarre Ian Saunders Carol Watts Lewis Dickinson |
| Specific responsibilities: | |
| Publicity | Carol Watts |
| Website | Peter Hassett |
| Membership | Arthur Allen |
| Programme | Jean Cooke Gordon Redford |
| Publications Editor | Jo Handford |

Exciting Plans for a Unique Park

It is an exciting time for us at The Parks Trust. There is a lot of activity taking place over the next few years to improve our parks for the public to enjoy, and we are very excited that Great Linford Manor Park has been included. In July 2016, we secured a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund [HLF] to carry out development work for our project to *Revive, Reveal and Restore* Great Linford Manor Park.

Great Linford Manor Park is a 16.5-acre park in the North East of Milton Keynes, and is unique due to its more intimate size and concentration of local heritage features. What can be seen today is the remnants of a 350-year-old designed landscape, surrounding the Manor House, and its features tell us a story through time. The site has been settled by humans since Saxon times and the iconic Manor House was built in its current iteration in 1690. The designed gardens followed later in the mid-1700s, probably a product of landscape designer Richard Woods, in the English Garden Style of an informal, naturalised show-piece landscape with carefully positioned trees, set-views, water features, rolling pasture and artfully located small buildings – elements of which are still present in the park, but in poor condition. Unfortunately, the original structure of the garden was lost soon after as the Grand Junction Canal was brought through the garden in 1800, followed by the Newport Pagnell Railway, dividing the park into North and South sections.

Despite the changes to the landscape that have taken place over the centuries, a significant number of important features remain. The 18th century pleasure garden ponds, fed by a local spring, developed from the ancient 'Hine Well', are the central feature of the park. A stepped cascade at the end of the third pond, part of the 18th Century garden design, provides an impressive feature in the North section of the park. The Old Quarry, consisting of exposed limestone faces, boasts a significant number of fossils to be found, as well as providing habitat for bees, wasps and other insects. The Wilderness, a typical feature of 18th Century planned gardens, provides an area to explore and would have been planted with exotic and interesting species – the ancient Lime can be found in this area. The Ha-Ha, a traditional feature created to separate gardens from the surrounding parkland, is still

present to some degree.

Through the HLF funding we aim to restore these features to their original condition and add improvements to the site such as better/extended footpaths, better interpretation in the form of signs and information boards, and extensive replanting more in fitting with the original species that would have been present. In addition to the physical restoration of the park we are looking for strong community involvement in the project. To this end, a Friends group will be formed with the aim of being involved in the care of the park and to help put on events/activities; for those who do not want to commit to a Friends group, regular volunteering events will take place where those interested can come and take part; educational events/walks/talks for both schools and the general public will be put on; and events such as the Food Festival will be encouraged to be part of a regular series of annual events.

During the development phase (now – March 2018) we will be aiming to hold a range of pilot events to help us form our Activity Plan for the Delivery Phase (June 2018 – 2022), which will then be rolled out in parallel to the physical works taking place.

There will be a range of ways that people who are interested can be involved, for all abilities and levels of availability. If you would like to find out more, voice your interest and sign up to our mailing list by getting in touch with the team at glmp@theparkstrust.com. In addition, regular updates will be posted on the [project webpage](#), as well as on The Parks Trust [Facebook page](#). Also, look out for information leaflets and posters that we will be distributing and we go forward.

We look forward to seeing you in the park soon!

**Mark Purrmann-Charles
Community Engagement
& Activity Co-ordinator
The Parks Trust**

Winter Wildlife Around the Area

We, and the wildlife of course, have enjoyed another mild winter, the Met. Office informing us that 2016 in general was the warmest since 1920. We had just one day when the snow lay for just a few hours and then `Doris` blew through, felling a few trees. But, generally the first three months of this year were mild enough for many of the Society`s members to report early spring flowers and insects on the wing.

Mammals Otters were observed in Willen North Lake both in December and January and on a regular basis at the Linford Lakes Nature Reserve over the winter.

One unusual sighting during December was a single long-eared bat inside a dormouse nest box during the winter clearance of the old nests at Little Linford Wood. Also, during January, when examining the reptile survey tins at the Linford Lake Nature Reserve, a water shrew was discovered beneath one.

Birds December appeared to have been a quiet month for discoveries of unusual birds locally, with Linford Lakes Reserve coming to the fore with reports of two bitterns, a lesser spotted woodpecker and three red-crested pochards.

However, there was an improvement during January with waxwings arriving locally in the Oldbrook area.

The Stony Stratford Reserve attracted three goosanders, while reports from Willen Lake included goldeneye and a scaup. On the 19th of that month a bittern was reported at the Walton Lakes. At the Wolverton Mill Floodplain Reserve a single barnacle goose was discovered in a flock of Canada geese, together with a peregrine falcon sporting a leg ring. Details from the ring were taken and it was discovered that it was originally hatched in a nest on the tower of Salisbury Cathedral.

February was a busier month with Linford Lakes Reserve attracting a scaup, pintail ducks, firecrest, Jack snipe and the two bitterns. There were records of red-crested pochard, goldeneye and a Caspian gull on Willen Lake. At Stony Stratford Reserve a goosander, a pair of Mandarin duck and the return of the oystercatchers. Other sightings included golden plover at Tongwell, the resident Peregrines at MK Dons Stadium and a sole cattle egret that remained for several days in a field near Fenny Stratford. There

were several sightings around Milton Keynes, including the CMK Shopping Centre, of the Waxwings, including around 40 at Oldbrook. During March the waxwings were still feeding around different sites in Milton Keynes, the cattle egret remained near Fenny Stratford, and there were many reports of the red kite. The Wolverton Mill Floodplains attracted five goosanders, four oystercatchers and a shelduck. A bearded tit was recorded in the reed beds on the north lake at Willen and a black redstart appeared on the waste ground near Argos and Sainsburys.

By the time these records were submitted (March 25th) for the Society`s Magpie magazine, the only spring migrants recorded was a sandmartin at Willen on the 20th and chiffchaff at various sites during March. However, several of the chiffchaffs may have stayed in the UK enjoying our mild winter. One other warbler resident over winter was the Cetti`s that was heard calling around Willen and Linford Lakes Reserve.

Amphibians and reptiles: During December crews involved with road maintenance on the H7, Chaffron Way, found 5 great crested newts alive in a hole under a bridge. These were moved to a safe and more suitable place. By mid-February members reported frogs in their garden ponds with the first sighting of frogspawn at Elfield Park on the 20th of that month. On the same day a grass snake was seen sunning itself near Walton Lake. The first smooth newt reported was on the 16th February at Kingsmead and during the first few days of March, great crested newts were found at Linford Lakes Reserve. Only a week later there were several reports of smooth newts in several garden ponds.

Insects: Our first record of a butterfly this year was on the 18th January when a peacock was seen in flight near Walton Lake. However, by mid-February the Society`s members were observing comma, brimstone and small tortoiseshell.

Queen buff-tailed bumblebees and honey bees were reported in gardens in February together with a tree bumblebee in Howe Park Wood. In early March, red-tailed and common carder bees were seen. Two members reported finding double-striped pug moths

in their homes in February and the following month early flying moths such as oak beauty, Hebrew character, shoulder stripe and common, small, and twin-spotted quaker, were attracted to members` moth traps in their gardens.

Plants The display of white blossom along some of the grid roads in Milton Keynes has again been quite spectacular. Reports of the early flowering of blackthorn have been erroneous as this comes after. These are cherry blossoms {*Prunus serasifera*} – with its large, very white flowers covering the branches. The blackthorn comes a bit later (late March and into April) and has smaller, dirty-white flowers and the branches are clearly visible - and it is a shrub not a tree. “Pussy” willow (likely to be goat willow) has also put on a splendid display this year. Another increasingly seen flowering plant on grid roadside banks is the primrose – normally a woodland plant it seems to be surviving where planted. It has been almost impossible to have missed the vast quantities of planted daffodils. There are differing opinions about them; well loved, too many, too distracting, untidy after flowering- take your choice! But have you failed to see some of the early natives? – Colt`s-foot, lesser celandine, red dead-nettle for example? Spring is well on its way.

One early flowering plant recorded by members of our Society in February, growing on the roadside, was the Danish scurvy grass (*Cochlearia danica*). Known more as a coastal plant, it is believed to have been introduced in the salt used in winter on the roads and is now claimed to be the fastest spreading plant in the UK.

In a previous edition of our Magpie there was a variety of species named after recent celebrities. Here is a new one to add to that list. It is a rare moth found in California and Mexico with a striking crown of yellow and white scales on its head and a piercing stare. It has been name after a certain President *Neopalpa Donaldtrumpi*. Spring is here so search and record as many species as you can – happy hunting.

Tony Wood

P.S.- Has anyone found a common garden snail with a left sided spiral on its shell, mentioned in the last Magpie magazine yet? – I am still searching.

Recording update

Lewis and Julie will be running a session on recording and submission of records at the final indoor meeting on April 25th. Look out for new pages on identification resources and support for recording on the Society website.

A Great Day Out

A good place for a peaceful and relaxing day birdwatching is Rye Harbour in East Sussex. It is a large bird reserve mostly shingle with some pools and farmland. There are five bird hides. In summer you can see common, sandwich and little terns, ringed plover, oystercatcher, redshank, avocet, Mediterranean gull, yellow wagtail and wheatear which breed in tin cans in the shingle. In June there is a good display of shingle flora including kale, yellow-horned poppy, sea pea and vipers bugloss. Travel via St. Pancras to Ashford, then local train to Rye.

Colin Docketty



Avocet at Rye Harbour

Lines from Linda

The first quarter of the year has raced by and it's hard to believe we are almost at the end of our winter programme. As usual it has offered a great range of interesting talks which, at least for me, have provided motivation to get out and visit places like Burham Beeches, think again about how I keep my moth and bird records and what I do with them, and added to the list of countries I'd love to visit such as Sri Lanka. Now I'm really looking forward to our summer outings!

A few days of glorious weather have brought a rush of blossom and spring flowers, plus migrant birds such as chiffchaffs which have been very much in evidence as the entertainment during work parties at my local BBOWT reserve, Whitecross Green Wood. This wood is managed mainly for butterflies. Sadly the Wood White is no longer seen there, but it is well-known for Black and Brown Hairstreaks. Despite spending hours battling with Blackthorn through the winter to provide appropriate habitat for these butterflies, and more hours walking round the wood at night in June and July to survey for glow worms, I never get there at the right time to see these butterflies on the wing, so my top resolution for this year is to do just that!

Everyone has their own favourite 'first signs' of spring. I feel it is really on the way when I get my moth trap out again for the first time after the winter. I usually stop trapping at the end of October and start again at the beginning of March. It's always exciting to be checking the trap again, even if there is little in it! This year there were only 3 after a very wild and wet first night, but there is still the promise of weeks to come through the spring and into the peak summer months! It's like greeting old friends as familiar species like the common quaker and Hebrew character turn up, but of course there's always the hope for something more unusual such as the occasional (in my garden at any rate) blossom underwing or oak beauty.

For some years now I've been participating in the nationwide Garden Moth Scheme (GMS). This involves trapping regularly through the season on a Friday night, or a day or two either side if Friday

is not possible for any reason. The scheme is organised by regions across the UK, each with a co-ordinator, and records are sent in every 9 weeks on a spreadsheet which is provided. From 2017 onwards, they will be sharing these records with County Recorders. Up to now it has been down to individual participants to do this. Data is gathered on the locations (Vice County, type/size of garden, features and presence of certain plant species, distance from farmland/woodland/water), trap and bulb type, minimum temperature. Participants receive regular summaries of species and abundance per region, plus analyses and other news. There is a one-day conference each year, and this year a couple of talks were particularly interesting. Jason Newton from Edinburgh explained how stable isotopes of hydrogen vary in composition across the world, and don't break down over time, so if an animal drinks rainwater in a particular place, the specific isotopes are retained in the body and can be identified in chitin, for example in feathers or claws of birds, and wing cases of beetles or wing tissues of butterflies. Rainwater 'isoscapes' can be developed for specific species. If you want to find out more and how you can contribute to this development, go to <https://insectisoscap.es.com> John Wilson from Brecon explained how data from the GMS has been used to explore the effect of light pollution on moth abundance as this was one of the possible reasons put forward for a decline in moth abundance shown by the data from Rothamsted traps over the period 1968-2013, due to increasing urbanisation. It was argued that moths were more susceptible to predation when attracted to street lights and increased lighting had been found to disrupt reproductive behaviour. John's detailed analysis using UK stable night-time light maps found that a 12% decline in the 100 most widespread moth species could be attributed to light pollution.

Well I've strayed rather a long way from the arrival of spring, but one thing leads to another in the world of natural history! There is so much to see and do and find out about.... It's always great

to tick off something on your 'wish list', no matter what it is! By the time you read this, Julie should be back from volunteering on a sustainable fish stocks project in Madagascar, a really big tick on her list! I can't wait to hear how it went and hope she'll be persuaded to tell us all about it on at least one evening next winter. As a taster, in an email from the start of her trip while she still had access to the internet and was travelling to the project base, she wrote "the scenery has been incredible lots of hills/ mountains with rice paddies in the valleys....As we travelled south it has become more arid with one area of high featureless plateau and now we are into the scrubby thorny desert vegetation with a few absolutely gorgeous baobabs dotted around. We had two main stops on the way down, firstly at a beautiful area mountains like Uluru where we walked through a jungle of boulders and forest seeing ring tailed lemurs, chameleons and a Nile croc (in a marshy area). Then we did a 6hr trek in a national park (Isalo) which included a walk up through a river canyon and a swim in a pool at the base of a waterfall - wonderful! We had lunch at a picnic spot and a troop of gorgeous brown lemurs invaded the picnic trying to steal our food!!!" Welcome back Julie!

Linda Murphy

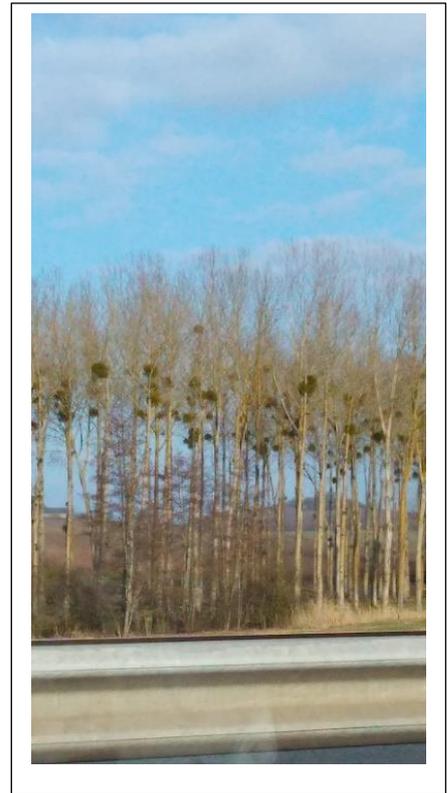
Groan Corner

I went to the zoo the other day. In one enclosure was a piece of toast. It was bread in captivity!

What did one tectonic plate say when it bumped into another one? '

Sorry, my fault'.

The Road to Paxos



Mistletoe in Northern France

Many species were spotted on Anne and Mark's recent trip to Paxos. These include razorbills, gannets and porpoises in the English Channel. Cranes, storks, polecat (road kill – not us!), great white egrets, mistletoe (on poplars) in France, a red kite in Switzerland and flocks of little egrets, Italian sparrow (these feed/collect grit on the slow lane of the motorway – braver than house sparrows!) in Italy. The Adriatic yielded glimpses of dolphins, Mediterranean shearwater, sandwich terns and kingfisher. Once in Paxos, almonds, mimosa, anemones and honesty were in flower, with lots of greenfinches, blackcaps and a peregrine.

MILTON KEYNES NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

48th Annual General Meeting

Cruck Barn, Bradwell Abbey – March 14th 2017

In attendance: Roy Maycock (in the Chair), Linda Murphy (Joint Chairman), Joe Clinch (Treasurer), Jean Cooke (Minuting), Jenny Mercer, Mary Sarre, Viola Read, Janice Robertson, Linda and Alan Piggott, Helen Wilson, Martin Kincaid, Mike Killeby, Chris Roberts, Frances Higgs, Gordon Redford, Mike Sheridan, Mike LeRoy, Ian Saunders, Peter Hasset, Philip Brown, Carol and Arthur Allen, Tony Wood, John Prince, Carol Watts

Apologies for absence were received from Julie Lane, Steve Brady, John and Margaret Wickham, Paul Lund, Peter Meadows, Robert Williams, Aaron Woods, Philip Sarre, Kate Redford, Joan Lancaster.

1. Minutes of the 47th AGM held on March 15th 2016, circulated in the April 2016 edition of The Magpie. Adoption of these as a correct record was proposed by Ian Saunders, seconded by Mike Killerby, and agreed nem con.

2. There were no matters arising.

3. Combined Officers' Report

This was read to the meeting by Linda Murphy and the full text is appended. The main points were as follows:

3.1 Both indoor and outdoor Programmes had been very successful and varied.

3.2 Approaching the Society's 50th year (next year), the Committee has been taking a careful look at securing its future.

3.3 Over the year there has been an increased focus on encouraging members to make and submit records of their wildlife sightings. Work is being done on resources to aid identification and submission of records.

3.4 The role of the website in reaching out to a wider audience has been enhanced – particular thanks are due to Peter Hasset for all his work on this. (Applause!)

3.5 Cooperation with other local organisations has been developing – with the Parks Trust and the MK50 Project in particular.

3.6 The experimental job share Chairmanship has proved a success.

3.7 Thanks are due to many people – both Committee members and others, for their dedication to the day-to-day functioning of the Society.

Adoption of this Report was proposed by Mike LeRoy, seconded by Mary Sarre and carried nem con.

4. Treasurer's Report

Joe Clinch presented his first report as Treasurer, and thanked Philip Brown for his support and assistance over the year. Main points from the Report are as follows (detailed Balance Sheets are available on request):

4.1 The Income and Expenditure Account shows a small surplus of £124.02 (2015 it was £291.80)

4.2 The total Income was up by £60.85 from the 2015 figure (£3391.15).

- 4.3 Subscription income, however, is down by £75 (representing 3 members) from 2015 (2016 - £2105.00, 2015 - £2180.00).
- 4.4 Donation income is up over the same period (£731.95 in 2016, £225.10 in 2015). However, £516.95 represents specific donations for new audio equipment in 2016.
- 4.5 Total expenditure is also up ((£3267.13 in 2016, £3038.5 in 2015) but again £516.95 of this was expenditure purchasing the new audio equipment.
- 4.6 There was a payment out of £200 from the Gordon Osborn Bequest Fund.
- 4.7 The Society and GOBF funds are held as shown (in £s):

| | Current account | Savings account | Treasury Bond | Totals |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Society | 2342.44 | 500.00 | | 2843.25 |
| GOBF | | Capital 774.26 Interest 470.54 | 1959.72 | 3204.52 |
| Totals | 2342.44 | 1745.61 | 1959.72 | 6047.77 |

(Note: Under the terms of the Gordon Osborn Bequest only the interest is available for allocation.)

Adoption of this Report was proposed by Martin Kincaid, seconded by John Prince and carried nem con.

5. Election of Officers

Linda Murphy took over the Chair, and called for nominations for the role of President of the Society. Roy Maycock was nominated by Mary Sarre seconded by Carol Watts. There being no other nominations he was declared elected.

Roy Maycock resumed the Chair and called for nominations for Vice-President. He nominated John Wickham and Martin Kincaid, and there being no other nominations they were declared elected.

Nominations for Chairman of the Society were called for. Roy Maycock proposed from the Chair that the current arrangement be continued, and nominated Julie Lane and Linda Murphy as Joint Chairmen for a further year. There being no other nominations they were declared elected.

Nominations were called for Secretary. Steve Brady (in absentea) was nominated by Tony Wood, seconded by Carol Watts. There being no other nominations he was declared elected.

Nominations for Treasurer were called for. Joe Clinch was nominated by Peter Hassett, seconded by John Prince. There being no other nominations he was declared elected.

6. Election of Committee

The Constitution of the Society provides that the Committee consist of the above Officers plus a further 8 members. All present members of the Committee – viz Arthur Allen, Jean Cooke, Lewis Dickinson, Peter Hassett, Paul Lund, Mary Sarre, Ian Saunders and Carol Watts were prepared to continue.

Martin Kincaid said he had understood there was a vacancy, and, in that case he had been intending to propose Colin Docketty. Mike LeRoy indicated that he would have seconded such a proposal. It was explained that while there had been a vacancy following the last AGM this had

been filled shortly afterwards by the cooption of Lewis Dickinson, who was now actively engaged with Julie Lane developing our recording strategy. In the light of this the nomination was not pursued.

The current committee members were proposed en bloc by Mike Sheridan, seconded by Viola Read. There being no further nominations they were declared elected.

The full membership of the Committee is, therefore:

Arthur Allen, Steve Brady, Joe Clinch, Jean Cooke, Lewis Dickinson, Peter Hassett, Martin Kincaid, Julie Lane, Paul Lund, Roy Maycock, Linda Murphy, Mary Sarre, Ian Saunders, Carol Watts, John Wickham.

7. Any Other Business

7.1 Linda Murphy asked whether there were still issues around the welcome offered to new members (following comments made at the last AGM and initiatives taken following discussion by the Committee). No one present had any comments to make.

7.2 A question was asked about what was being done to stem the reduction in membership over the past few years. Linda Murphy outlined a list of initiatives being taken: improved publicity via the development of a membership leaflet which was being made available at a variety of venues and events, our involvement in the MK50 events including walks, a Photographic Exhibition in the library, Nature day on 1 July, etc. The developments in the website were attracting more visits , and work is now underway to develop a presence in the social media..

7.3 It was announced that annual subscriptions could be paid at the end of the meeting – and that SO Forms were also available..

7.4 The tendency of the secretary to be “down under” at the time of the AGM was noted, – and the meeting formally closed.

REPORT OF THE SOCIETY OFFICERS TO THE 2017 AGM

Your Officers and Committee, assisted in many cases by other Society Members, have been very active over the past year, not only in providing the variety, quality and frequency of indoor and outdoor meetings which is second to none amongst Natural History Societies in Britain, but also in taking a careful look at the Society's future as Milton Keynes achieves its 50th anniversary this year and we approach our 50th next year.

Your Committee recently reviewed what the Society is doing to achieve its aims as set out in the constitution: *to promote and improve the knowledge and status of Natural History in Milton Keynes and the surrounding district and to co-operate with other organisations to achieve these ends where suitable opportunities arise*, and has agreed priorities and next steps outlined at relevant points in this Report.

The Society programme for the indoor meetings in the past year has provided a strong mix of talks and presentations about local wildlife, such as Hollington Wood, Waders in MK, Hazeley Wood, MK Tree ID. It has also included significant scientific and environmental issues (for example, The Rosetta Mission and Wildlife Crime) conservation work (for example, the Role and Focus of BBOWT's Conservation Work, Woodcock Population Trends and Swift Conservation) There have been talks on broader issues concerning British wildlife locally and further afield (such as Wild Britain and The Changing Face of British Wildlife) as well as increasing interest in the natural world in the broadest sense (for example, History of Plants, History of Astronomy, Natural History in other parts of the world) and providing entertainment and inspiration in the form of quiz, debate, and members' evenings. Presentations have been greatly enhanced by the up-grading of the Society's sound system. Jean Cook is to be congratulated on putting together such high quality programmes week by week and year on year!

The 2016 summer programme included visits to a range of sites within the Milton Keynes area or within easy travelling distance. These sites represent a mix of habitats and offer an opportunity to those new to the area to explore sites with which they are unfamiliar and find out about the natural world on their doorstep. For those who are already familiar with the sites, it offers a chance to review and record and to check that key site species are continuing to thrive. Special thanks are due to Gordon Redford for co-ordinating and managing the summer programme for seven years, and to Mary Sarre for taking over this role.

During the year there has been an increased focus on encouraging members to make and submit records of their wildlife sightings. The Society is working to provide resources and routes to assist identification and submission of records through the website along with practical support at specific meetings. Your Committee plans to continue and enhance work in this area over the coming year.

Its role in our recording activities underlines the importance of the Society Website more generally. Our site has the potential to reach, and indeed statistics reveal it is reaching, a wide audience. It has helped forge links and raise awareness of the Society with other groups such as the Bucks Bird Club, but in particular the dynamic news and - recently revamped - sightings sections are encouraging more of our own members to contribute actively. Particular thanks are due to Peter Hasset for all his work in maintaining, upgrading and developing the site to achieve such a high quality, useful resource and marketing tool for the Society. The committee is now considering the development of a Facebook page

to try and reach an even wider and, perhaps, younger audience. Nevertheless, it appears that many current members found out about the Society by word of mouth, so members are encouraged to talk about the Society whenever they can!

During the year the Society has worked with the Parks Trust to participate in the Bioblitz at Stony Stratford Reserve in the summer and in the second Nature Day held at Howe Park Wood (providing displays and activities). Members of the Society have responded to requests for talks and surveys from local groups and individuals (for example, a talk about the history of MKNHS for a Bletchley group, and a moth survey in Hollington Wood). Members were also invited to the official launch of the Floodplain Forest reserve.

Following discussion between the Society Co-chairmen and the MK50 project manager the Society Committee has agreed a number of contributions from the Society to the celebrations. These will include some self-guided nature walks, participation in the Parks Trust Festival of Nature and a photographic exhibition at the central Library.

As can be seen from the Treasurer's Report the Society's finances are basically sound, although we are always vulnerable to increases in meeting room costs etc. Increasing the Society membership will be important if this position is to be maintained. A perusal of the Treasurer's report will provide an example of the dedication and professionalism Joe Clinch has brought to his first year in this demanding position.

This year also saw the Society experiment with job-sharing for the Chair role. After 12 months, it seems clear that this has been a success - Julie Lane and Linda Murphy have worked well together to deliver a highly effective Chairing service to the Society. If re-elected they will continue their double act over the next 12 months.

It would be invidious to single out too many of the numerous Officers, Committee members, and ordinary members of the Society whose commitment and effort has made MKNHS what it is today. Special thanks, however, are due to the dedicated band who open, prepare and close the Cruck Barn for indoor meetings, and herd the hard core of members, lost in that post-meeting conviviality which is a feature of our Society, out into the night by 10pm.

It only remains to congratulate Society stalwart John Prince on becoming the first member to reach a very lively and active 91 years old. Also to reiterate, as we do every year, that we welcome members who want to become more active in the running of the Society - it's great fun, and the results are, I think, clearly worthwhile.

Steve Brady, Secretary MKNHS in absentia in the Antipodes, on behalf of the Officers