



The following is a summary by Officers and Members with Specific responsibilities, setting out the Society's achievements during 2024 under the heading of the relevant Committee where applicable.

The objectives of the Society and the Strategies for achieving them can be seen in the Trustees' report and on our website. <https://www.sos.org.uk/about-the-sos>

SUSSEX ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Council

The Society is managed and run by a member elected Council who are also Trustees of the Society.

The current members of Council as at 31 December 2024 are as follows:- **Clare Buckle** (Chair), **Alan Swetman** (Secretary), **Ted Merrikin** (Treasurer), **Chas Holt** (Chair of Scientific Committee), **Jonno Cook** (Chair of Membership & Publicity Committee), **Mya Bambrick** (Council Member), **Susan Kerry Bedell** (Council Member), **Tony Benton** (Council Member), **Steve Gilbert** (Council Member), **Katie Nethercoat** (Council Member), **Pat Wilder** (Council Member).

Council is supported and advised by **Chris Corrigan** (President).

Committees

The work of Council is hugely supported by the work of the various committees and sub-committees.

Membership of these as of 31 December 2024 was as follows: -

Scientific Committee: Chas Holt (Chair), Joanne Chattaway (Secretary), Dave Boddington, Dr Helen Crabtree, Alison Giacomelli, Pete Hughes, Gareth James, Mark Mallalieu Dr John Newnham, Dr Ken Smith, David Thorns.

Bird Report: Mark Mallalieu (Editor), Chris Barfield, Joanne Chattaway, Graham Hughes (Asst. Editor), Paul James, Simon Linington, Owen Mitchell, Dr John Newnham, Laurence Pitcher, Dr Ken Smith, David Thorns.

Records Committee: David Thorns (Recorder), Brian Cox, Andrew House, Gareth James, Paul James, Jamie Partridge, Matt Phelps, Laurence Pitcher.

Membership & Publicity Committee: Jonno Cook (Chair), Val Bentley, Chris Brown, Chris Davis, Thalia Griffiths, David Porter, Audrey Wende, Pat Wilder, Dr Mark DM Wright.

Outing/Programme Committee: Dr Mark DM Wright (Outings Organiser), Bernie Forbes, Audrey Wende.

To all members of the Society's Council, Committees other volunteers and to those who have retired during 2024, our very sincere thanks for all your hard work.

REPORT OF COUNCIL

CHAIR'S REPORT

I am pleased to present the annual report for the Society for 2024, which reflects the wide range of activities the Society is involved in, and the huge number of volunteers who give up their time to make this work possible. We are sincerely grateful to everyone who has supported the Society during the year.

The Society's finances remain sound. Our uncommitted reserves currently stand at £103,939 although it should be noted that £40,000 of this is legacy money being retained for significant projects once they are identified. Requests for funding were short on the ground this year so Council has focused upon developing a funding strategy that will inform three key areas for funding: **Priority Bird Species** that need our help, **Habitat Conservation**, and **Engagement**. As a result of this efforts have been made to develop and maintain strong links with partner organisations who may need our support, as well as planning further promotion of the excellent Young Birders Scheme. As well as funding for young birders, the 'engagement' stream will also be used to provide funding for 'access for all' initiatives such as improving access on nature reserves for those with a disability.

In September we were able to see some Society funding in action when a group from Council were invited to SWT's Waltham Brooks reserve to see their Society funded NoFence grazing technology in action. This technology consists of solar-powered GPS collars worn by the cattle and a virtual boundary which is set up remotely. This has been a game changer for site managers who can move cattle around into different areas with a few clicks. Members were able to read a full report in the excellent winter newsletter.

Council met five times during the year and there were some changes to the makeup of Council during 2024. At the May meeting, Chas Holt was welcomed as the new Chair of Scientific Committee, following the retirement of Mark Mallalieu from this role. We are very grateful to Mark for his contribution to the Society in this role over the last few years. During the year Jon Curson and Ez Heath resigned, and Steve Gilbert was co-opted onto Council. Steve offers himself for formal election to Council at the AGM in April 2025. Mya Bambridge is stepping down to focus on her final year of university studies. We are extremely grateful to Jon, Ez and Mya for all they have contributed to Council during their tenures.

Major items for discussion have included the ongoing work of ensuring that all aspects of risk are effectively managed for the Society, with the completion of the work finalising risk assessments for all our activities.

We have found our membership of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) to be valuable for accessing advice and training. In December myself and Tony Benton (Safeguarding Advisor) attended annual safeguarding training and have implemented enhancements to the Society's safeguarding measures for children and adults at risk as a result.

We have ambitious plans to develop a new website with a dedicated members area. Towards the end of the year, we invited several companies to quote for a new website and we have now selected a provider who will work with a small team of us in 2025 to progress this project.

All members of Council, the various Committees, and survey teams have once again invested a huge amount of time on the Society's behalf and our sincere thanks go to them all.

Clare Buckle - Chair of Council

TREASURER'S REPORT

Sussex Ornithological Society once again had a financially positive year in 2024. Income from members' subscriptions, legacies, donations, and gift aid was £42,032. The Society is extremely grateful to members for all donations received. All monies given will be used to support conservation projects. We are particularly grateful for the legacies left to the Society by individuals remembering us in their wills.

During the year, the Society donated a total of £3,201 for conservation projects. This was very disappointing, but we are actively looking for deserving projects in 2025 and beyond.

2024 saw many more of you joining or renewing your membership of the Society via our website, this is of great importance to us as it regularises our database information that we hold for members. I would like to encourage all members who pay yearly by standing order to renew through our web site selecting DIRECT DEBIT. This will enable more members to be recognised on our database via Member Press. You possibly do not know that a huge amount of work is involved in inputting data manually for those who pay through the bank. Please may I ask for your help in reducing this work by renewing your membership via our website. May I remind those of you who have joined or renewed online in the past, the system will only allow you to renew after the year end. For those of you that are uncomfortable with the online mechanism we would be happy for you to send a cheque to Ted Merrikin, Blessings, Barns Farm Lane, Storrington, West Sussex RH20 4AH.

Our accountants Kreston Reeves have completed the examination of the Society's accounts for 2024, and I have included the Statement of Financial Activities and Balance sheet in a simplified format. Greater detail of the Trustees' Report and financial statement can be found on our website in addition to that of the Charity Commissions.

Since 1972 the Society has donated over £475,000 to deserving projects, so a huge thank you for all your support over the decades. I would urge you to register with us for Gift Aid if you are a taxpayer as it makes a massive difference to our income, being able to claim back an extra 25% on top of your membership and donations that you give to the Society. Gift Aid is worth £1.3 billion to the Charity Sector, but every year more than £500 million goes unclaimed. To date we have been able to claim a substantial amount back from HMRC, more than £91.000. On behalf of the Society thank you so much.

The annual Bird Race remains a very popular event at the beginning of each year, although the number of entrants was reduced during the pandemic it has regained momentum. Since 2002 the sum raised by participating teams has risen to more than £37,900 including gift aid.

Ted Merrikin – Treasurer

Sussex Ornithological Society

Statement of financial activities for the year ended 31 December 2024

		Unrestricted funds 2024 £	Designated funds 2024 £	Restricted funds 2024 £	Total funds 2024 £	Total funds 2023 £
Note						
Income from:						
Donations, legacies and Gift Aid	3	7,851	-	-	7,851	47,450
Charitable activities	4	3,313	-	-	3,313	2,453
Other trading activities	5	2,864	-	-	2,864	2,229
Investments	6	5,151	-	-	5,151	4,268
Membership subscriptions	7	21,954	900	-	22,854	20,484
Total income		41,133	900	-	42,033	76,884
Expenditure on:						
Raising funds	8	499	-	-	499	266
Charitable activities	10	28,767	-	-	28,767	61,499
Depreciation on Society's equipment	19	310	-	-	310	310
Total expenditure		29,576	-	-	29,576	62,075
Net movement of funds		11,557	900	-	12,457	14,809
Reconciliation of funds:						
Total funds brought forward		84,350	7,082	-	91,432	76,623
Net movement of funds		11,557	900	-	12,457	14,809
Transfer between funds		(38,872)	38,872	-	-	-
Total funds carried forward		57,035	46,854	-	103,889	91,432

Balance Sheet

As at 31 December 2024

	Note	2024 £	2023 £
Fixed Assets			
Equipment owned by the Society	19	1,290	1,600
Current assets			
Debtors	20	-	3,509
Cash at bank and in hand		130,018	133,231
		<u>130,018</u>	<u>136,740</u>
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	21	(27,419)	(46,908)
Net current assets		<u>103,889</u>	<u>91,432</u>
Total assets less current liabilities		<u>103,889</u>	<u>91,432</u>
Net current assets		<u>103,889</u>	<u>91,432</u>
Charity funds			
Restricted funds	22	-	-
Designated funds	22	46,854	7,082
Unrestricted funds	22	57,035	84,350
Total funds		<u>103,889</u>	<u>91,432</u>

The financial statements were approved and authorised for issue by the Trustees on 12/03/2025 and signed on their behalf by:

Clare Buckle

Clare Buckle
Chair of Council

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

There were five Scientific Committee meetings in 2024, four held via Zoom video conferencing and one in person. Alison Giacomelli was formally welcomed on to the Committee at the January meeting and Chas Holt was elected as the new Chair at the April meeting. Members of the Committee have made valuable contributions to the Society's work, including on records, the database, surveys, conservation, the Sussex Bird Report and archiving, which are reported below.

Joanne Chattaway – Secretary to Scientific Committee

THE SUSSEX BIRD REPORT

The 2023 Sussex Bird Report was published and delivered to members in October 2023, well ahead of schedule. A review by BirdGuides described it as '*something of a gold standard*' for county bird reports. The 296 pages contain the systematic list covering the 257 species recorded during 2023, plus Escapes and Introductions, informative maps, tables and graphs, as well as photographs and artwork. There were six papers that covered the 2023 BTO Woodcock survey; ringing of warblers and other birds at Beachy Head; passage migrants at Sheepcote Valley; Turtle Doves around the Knepp Estate; the Society's 2023 Nightjar survey; and the November 2023 seabird influx.

The report also included the explanatory Introduction to the Classified Records, the Review of the Year, BTO Breeding Bird Survey results, Sussex Winter Bird Survey results, the Ringing Report, updated First & Last Migrant Dates, the Wealden Heaths Breeding Bird survey table and Finders' accounts for notable species in 2023, all firsts for Sussex: Little Swift, White-crowned Sparrow, Iberian Chiffchaff and Turkestan Shrike.

The drafting and production of the report involved over 50 people, consisting of species account writers, proof-readers, assistant editor, the writers of the various papers and articles and the contribution of many superb photographs and pieces of artwork. As ever, essential preparatory work involved making comprehensive 2023 data accessible, with guidance for account writers and proof-readers. I am hugely grateful to everyone involved, including my colleagues in the Editorial Team:

Graham Hughes, Chris Barfield, Joanne Chattaway, Paul James, Simon Linington, Owen Mitchell, Dr John Newnham, Laurence Pitcher, Dr Ken Smith and David Thorns.

Our printers again did an excellent and speedy job of printing and arranging distribution of the report. My thanks to the team at Swallowtail Print Ltd.

Mark Mallalieu – Bird Report Editor

CONSERVATION

The Conservation team continue to keep up to date with national planning policy and other issues affecting birds in Sussex. Government has introduced an updated National Planning Policy Framework, the document which dictates the application of planning at a local level this includes, worryingly, an increase in targets for housebuilding delivery for all Local Authorities.

We work with other wildlife and conservation bodies to pursue the best outcome from local plans and planning decisions wherever possible (Sussex Wildlife Trust, RSPB, Woodland Trust and the

Council for the Preservation of Rural England). Once a site is allocated for housing as part of a Local Plan opposing that development becomes problematical.

During 2024 Wealden District Council published their Local Plan in draft, concerns surround proposals for a large development south-west of Uckfield at Owlsbury Farm, particularly in the light of other developments in the vicinity this looks likely to proceed.

Horsham and Mid Sussex Districts both submitted their latest draft Plans to Government in 2024. We are broadly happy with the Horsham plan but that for Mid-Sussex allocates land for a huge westward extension of Sayers Common.

It is expected that the South Downs National Park Authority will publish their draft Plan for comment in early 2025, and we will be examining carefully proposals expected for the development of the old cement works site at Upper Beeding.

Following the stated policy of Government to increase housing delivery we have seen developers bring forward plans for housing on land not allocated for housing in existing Local Plans. Applications have been submitted for new “villages” at Crouchlands Farm (Plaistow) and Ansty, both of which the Society has objected to, plus a large new development east of Kingsfold. We are also following early-stage plans for developments at Frant and Hamsey (Lewes).

We have concerned ourselves with plans for the Rampion 2 offshore windfarm, which have now been examined by Government at a public enquiry and look set to proceed. Unfortunately, the cable routing, from Climping beach north-east to a new sub-station at Cowfold, will cause considerable, hopefully largely temporary, disruption to bird habitats. Concerns about the effect on breeding Nightingales in the Twineham/Cowfold area remain.

Efforts to improve the statutory protection of West Rise Marsh are ongoing and alongside concerns regarding proposals for a large solar farm nearby. We are engaged with Chichester DC over the implications for the Drayton Gravel pits (East of Chichester) of a proposed 350 house development on land originally designated by the council as part of a wildlife corridor connecting Selsey Bill with the South Downs. Efforts continue to try to achieve a satisfactory outcome for Brent Geese that will be displaced by a conditional approval for development close to the west side of Pagham Village and just north of Pagham Harbour SAC.

While the team endeavour to keep abreast of what is happening across the County, things get missed. It helps if members, becoming aware of planning proposals or anything that they think may affect their local bird habitats, e-mail us as soon as possible - conservation@sos.org.uk

Conservation Team: Terry Allen, Susan K Bedell, Anthony Holden, Warren Long and Pat Wilder.

CHARLESTON REEDBED

The beginning of the year was the end of a very wet winter season. We found gaps in the weather (and water levels) to coppice some areas of willow but the late February work party with the South Downs Volunteer rangers had to be cancelled. It was so decided that we would stop booking the Thursday volunteers for tasks (as this had to be done up to three months in advance) and create our own volunteer group for the site whereby we call a workday one or two weeks in advance, when we know the conditions will be favourable.

In Summer we are usually very busy with bird ringing on the site, but some time was taken to renew board walks and hedge trim the blackthorns in the net rides as well as having a good go at

the balsam. We also managed to cut a small area of reedbed which we have not been able to do for some years. It is good to rake off all the dead reed from previous years, preventing mulch build up which can lead to grass, nettle and bramble moving in.

In November, we ran a successful volunteer day with the Society and volunteers from our National Park 'Thursday group'. Eight of us tackled a thicket of bramble and nettle and cleared a large area, which will improve the area for insects, providing food as well as better nesting habitat for birds.

This so far has been a much more productive year!

Natasha Stonestreet

DATABASE

At the end of 2024 the Society's database of records held 7,952,675 records from nearly 3841 sites within Sussex. This large collection of records has been provided by 11,869 observers. During 2024 over 613,105 records were added to the database, 60% involved observations for 2024, 39% for 2023 sightings and less than 1% for all earlier years. Like previous years, records have been labelled as coming from over 50 sources; those providing most records were the BTO's Birdtrack (49%), Cornell University eBird (30%), BTO's Garden Bird Watch (3%), BTO's Wetland Bird Survey (3%), Horsham District Council Reserves and the BTO's Breeding Bird Survey (both 2%). The 2024 dataset will not be completed until later in 2025 but more details about the 2023 records were published in the 76th Sussex Bird Report.

In keeping with other years nearly 468,000 records were shared with the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre in the late summer. This dataset comprised mainly 2023 records but included a substantial number of records from earlier years. These observations then became readily available for use by local authorities, conservationists and researchers. The Society's multi-user online database CoBRA2 (C2) continued to be used extensively and regularly during the year. The record extraction module was used on 1670 occasions on 300 different days by 29 different users. The Account Writers module, which includes considerable analysis of the records, was accessed less frequently with most use, as expected, during the Sussex Bird Report writing and editing process. This module of the database was interrogated on 664 occasions by 31 users on 111 different dates.

Maintenance of the database requires considerable effort from both the database team (Dr John Newnham, Alex Glossop, dealing with eBird records, and Jan ten Sythoff working with iRecord records) and the Recorder (David Thorns). During the year 242 batches of records, varying between 110,196 and a single record, were processed and uploaded on 111 different dates. Adding new records to the database involved 112 batches totally 650,684 records but many of these needed further edits and 120 batches (120,207 records) dealt with these record amendments. With multiple record sources substantial duplication occurred and ten batches during the year were run to remove 46,726 duplicates. Furthermore, despite the extensive automated record checking programmed into the system there was still much work to be done by the bird report, database and recording teams to contact observers about potential erroneous records.

The database continues to function very well and required no significant changes during the year. Once again Chris Brown, the Society's Webmaster, and his colleague Andy Lawrence have continued to be very responsive on the few occasions there is an issue. The Society continues to

be extremely grateful to Chris and Andy for the continuing work maintaining CoBRA2 and to Alex and Jan for their valuable help during 2024.

Dr John Newnham – Database Manager

RECORDS 2023

This summary relates to bird observations made in 2023 due to the time required to process and analyse a year's records, and to maintain continuity with previous Recorder's reports. 257 species were recorded in Sussex in 2023, 11 fewer than the previous year. The year was remarkable for the addition of four new species to the Sussex list: Little Swift, White-crowned Sparrow, Iberian Chiffchaff and Turkestan Shrike, all of these occurring during the first half of the year.

The arrival of Storm Ciarán to Southern England on 2nd November ushered in unprecedented numbers of rare seabirds which made for a larger workload than usual for a Recorder in late autumn! Most notable was a remarkable influx of Leach's Petrels, observed close offshore from points all along the Sussex coastline. The numbers were such that all records were "waived through", although observers were still required to make submissions for the other species concerned (such as European Storm Petrel, Sabine's Gull and Grey Phalarope).

An annual total of 160 records were assessed by the Society's Rarities Committee (SOSRC), the vast majority of which (92%) were accepted. Records were prepared into batches and circulated to the committee by the Recorder who was gratefully aided throughout the year by Martin Orchard-Webb (Assistant Recorder) and John Newnham (Database Manager). A further 13 records involved rarer species which were assessed by the British Birds Rarities Committee (BBRC) - our four county "firsts" were among them.

In mid-August a report of the nationally scarce migrants occurring in Sussex in 2022 was prepared and sent to Steve White for the annual report in British Birds (2024 Vol.117: Pages 358–384). In late November a report of nationally rare breeding birds in Sussex in 2022 was prepared and sent to Dr Mark Eaton, secretary of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, for the annual report published in British Birds (2024 Vol.117: Pages 591–656).

RECORDS 2024

The year was rather less spectacular than the last with no new species for the county discovered. Nevertheless, there were plenty of interesting sightings, pride of place perhaps going to an exhausted-looking Brown Booby found on the seawall at Ovingdean in October - if accepted this is only the second recorded in Sussex.

At the beginning of the year, it was with regret that Martin Orchard-Webb was to step down as Assistant Recorder. His assistance had been invaluable over past years and much appreciated by all. Following this announcement, it was decided that, for the time being at least, no replacement would be sought for this position.

A total of 121 submissions were handled by the Recorder during the year: 113 were prepared in batches and circulated to the Society's Rarities Committee (SOSRC), whilst the remaining eight involved nationally rare species which were transferred to the British Birds Rarities Committee

(BBRC). Submissions to SOSRC were generally of a high standard and only five records were considered Not Proven. By the end of the year there were four records still awaiting formal submission to BBRC, and potentially another ten for submission to SOSRC.

With more and more observers using digital photography and social media it was possible for the Recorder to use them to “fastrack” certain records of clearly identifiable, photographed species (Red-backed Shrike, Glossy Ibis and Hoopoe being notable examples). This avoided the usual (lengthier) assessments at SOSRC and made the overall verification process timelier and more efficient.

In late September a report of the nationally scarce migrants occurring in Sussex in 2023 was prepared and sent to Steve White for the annual report in British Birds. In November, a report of nationally rare breeding birds in Sussex in 2023 was prepared and sent to Dr Mark Eaton, secretary of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel, for his annual report to be published in the same journal.

As usual the Recorder liaised closely throughout the year with John Newnham (Database Manager) in the streamlining of the database, removing all “unproven” records and validating those that had been accepted by SOSRC.

David Thorns – Recorder

SURVEYS

In 2024 the Society organised a breeding Corn Bunting survey. The survey protocol followed the methodology from the previous survey in 2014. 76 tetrads (2km x 2km) squares were allocated to volunteers to cover. The full results will be published in the 2024 Sussex Bird Report.

The following long-term annual surveys continued to be carried out in 2024 (survey coordinator’s name in brackets):

- The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS), (Dr Helen Crabtree), 201 1km squares (up from 191) were surveyed this year by 147 volunteers.
- Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS), (Dr Helen Crabtree and Dave Boddington): Most of the main sites in Sussex were covered in 2023/2024.
- Co-ordinated sea watching records for 2023 were summarised in the Sussex Bird Report by Dr John Newnham.
- The 2024 Heronries Census (Dr Helen Crabtree) Counts were completed at 42 sites by 36 observers in 2023.
- The Wealden Heaths Breeding Bird Survey – West Sussex (Alan Perry) covered 12 heathland sites in 2024. The five priority species surveyed were Nightjar, Woodlark, Tree Pipit, Stonechat and Dartford Warbler.
- Three Waterways Breeding Bird Surveys (WBBS) (Dr Helen Crabtree) were carried out.
- In winter 2023/24 the Sussex Winter Bird Survey (SWBS) (Christine George) was completed for its thirteenth year. 92 individual volunteers were involved with 145 1km squares receiving at least one visit, and 134 squares getting two visits.

During the winters of 2023/24 and continuing into 2024/25 there was also a BTO winter gull survey (WinGS), coordinated by WeBS local organisers. Five inland sites were covered by five observers, and 18 coastal sites were covered by 20 observers.

In late 2024, the BTO announced that it had intends to carry out a new national Bird Atlas project covering 2027-2031.

Pete Hughes – Surveys Officer

SUSSEX BARN OWL GROUP

By November all Sussex Barn Owl Group (SBOG) monitoring and ringing data has been received and reviewed, which provides an accurate account of SBOG 2024 Barn Owl activity and the Barn Owl standing in Sussex.

The Group found a slight increase in early broods this year with 77% of chicks ringed in the last two weeks of June and the first two weeks of July. An average brood size of 2.44 was the smallest encountered from the time there has been consistency in monitoring (since 2020). The view being the exceptionally wet early spring may have led to difficulty in hunting, which did not allow females to put on the weight necessary to lay large clutches.

However, from over 200 Sussex boxes visited by our ringers and Schedule 1 agents we found a 48% Barn Owl occupancy – the highest for five years. 125 boxes in total were occupied as follows: 97 by Barn Owls, 93 of which contained breeding birds. Other boxes occupied included the following species: Stock Dove, (19 boxes). Western Jackdaw (eight boxes). Common Kestrel (two boxes). Tawny Owl (one box) and Mandarin Duck (one box).

Two hundred and forty-one Barn Owls were ringed by the Group, two hundred and twenty-seven pullus (chicks) and fourteen adults. 2024 was the first year the Group embarked on a BTO endorsed and Society sponsored colour ringing project where both adult and young Barn Owls were marked with highly visible, uniquely lettered rings, the objective to discover more about chick dispersal and adult movements, it will be a meaningful project.

In August and September four colour ring sightings and seven recoveries were reported to us. Dispersal of young Barn Owls is thought to be local, although we did find a significant movement in 2023 of a bird moving 156Km, so far this year we have had two colour ringed birds found over 40km from the natal ringing site.

A box on the Cuckmere riparian corridor contained a brood of three Barn Owls, which were Dark breasted Owl (*Tyto Alba guttata*) and ‘our’ white Owl (*Tyto Alba alba*) mixed parentage, although a license for DNA sampling was granted it was found the UK DNA database did not contain any *guttata* illustrations!

So, despite the wet spring where an average of 301.7mm of rain fell, which was nearly a third (32 per cent) more than is typical for the period – our Sussex Barn Owls had a ‘run-of-the-mill’ breeding season, and we continue to see no demise in our Sussex population.

Terry Hallahan

SWIFTS

Local Swift groups continued to expand across the county, with the larger existing groups consolidating their data and findings.

Remaining the largest of these groups is Lewes Swift Supporters, which identified 84 active nests during 2024, one more than the previous year. From analysis they have carried out, the 47% decline between 2000 and 2023 in nesting pairs of Swifts in Lewes appears to be significantly less than the 68% nationwide and especially the 81% in Sussex over the same period. In fact, over the past three years they show a stable number of active nests, which would certainly be very good news if this is replicated elsewhere.

Attempting to get the installation of Swift bricks (for new builds) into the local planning framework has also been a key element of many local groups, although even when this has been enabled the compliance from developers seems somewhat lacking – some authorities have as little as 25% compliance.

Many more Swift nest boxes have been installed in various locations in different parts of the county, and attention is turning to the finer points of design and placement to find the most effective way forward. Additionally, the take-up rate for Swifts (and other species such as House Sparrow) is being investigated to assess the success rate of the boxes over time.

Many of the local Swift groups continue to work with other groups involved in increasing the biodiversity of local communities.

Dave Boddington -Swift Champion

HIRUNDINES

It has been a busy year with House Martin nesting colonies and projects in the main.

I was lucky enough to visit and count a colony at Saddlescombe Farm where the National Trust have now commissioned artificial nest cups to support the 31 active mud nest cups being used this summer. I am also advising on the swallows at this site which are struggling.

Furthermore, I will be writing up a Swallow, Swift and Martin conservation strategy for use at this site and generically for all National Trust properties in the UK.

At the beginning of July, I was invited by Society member Peter Smith to the strong colony of House Martins at Eridge in East Sussex. It was interesting to see the mud nests being built under deep sloping eaves and critically, the heavily textured walls which provided good support for the mud nests. 19 active nests were counted at the time and many more that had been used in previous years. Many thanks to Peter and the owner of the property.

Linking up with Society members Tim Parmenter and Reg Lanaway to look at the House Martin colony at Plumpton Agricultural College in December was inspirational. Between Tim and Reg, they have been recording active nest cups at this site for many years. It was therefore encouraging to see that numbers have risen to 36 active nests after several years with them at around half this

amount. Plans are being developed to help support this colony for the future especially as it appears to be the largest recorded colony in Sussex during 2024.

The Arundel town project phase 1 was successfully delivered with a total of 34 Swift boxes, 30 House Martin nest cups and 2 Swallow cups fitted. A House Martin nesting tower was also fitted. I ran two survey training sessions for residents to look for Swift, House Martin and Swallow nest sites. At least 1 of the House Martin nest cups was inspected but no nesting in any of them was recorded. A second phase is planned to be delivered in early 2025.

The Clymping village project phases 1 and 2 were delivered this year with a total of 28 Swift boxes, 23 House Martin nest cups and a Swallow cup fitted. One of the Swift boxes which had a caller attached managed to attract a pair of Swifts in its first season.

I supported a project in the parish of Shipley near Horsham where we fitted eight House Martin nest cups and two Swallow cups to various buildings including a school, scout group building and village halls.

Warnham Nature Reserve are now playing host to six recently fitted artificial House Martin nest cups to their visitor centre.

Paul Stevens – Hirundine Champion

MEMBERSHIP & PUBLICITY

The Society's Membership and Publicity Committee met four times in 2024, and its outputs were wide and varied thanks to the dedication of the team.

Membership has maintained during the year and our membership secretary; Chris Davis has successfully introduced a new initiative by way of a quarterly emailing to new members to keep them informed of activities within the Society and events they may wish to take part in. We are overhauling our membership database to create better streamlining of processes. The website is also being reviewed by a small team to bring it up to date and improve its functionality. A big thanks to Chris Brown for keeping the wheels on the current one.

The year started with the annual Bird Race, organised by Val Bentley with many teams participating and raising an impressive total towards Society funds. The field outings programme went to 29 locations, mostly within the county, covering all points of the compass and a variety of habitats in all months of the year. 26 events were staged at the weekend and 11 in midweek. The co-ordination of these events was thanks to Mark Wright and Audrey Wende and 19 leaders who also generously gave their time and expertise to make them a success. It should be noted that we need new people to step up and lead these walks as age is catching up with some of our leaders. Unfortunately, we had to cancel one event last year due to this. We overhauled our Risk Assessment processes for these events in the year, a necessity of modern life and to be compliant with Charity Commission regulations.

David Porter with the help Val Bentley and many other volunteers helped stage our annual Conference, our second at Oathall College. This was well attended by members with four high quality presentations.

The Newsletter was published quarterly, these are always a great read with a variety of articles about birds and birders in the county and reports from our outings. Thalia Griffiths has done a fantastic job in editing these publications and co-ordinating the team of contributors and text checking volunteers to get these delivered to you. Thalia is looking at refreshing the design of the Newsletter. Inflationary pressures on both print and postage costs are eating into the financial sustainability of these publications. We also need to review how these are distributed. An immediate help would be if you could consider changing your receipt method from paper copy to digital.

We staged two online webinars in February and March thanks to Caroline Ward, one covered the awful impact of Avian Influenza on bird populations and on a lighter, but just as important note, Mya Bambrick's young birdwatching adventures of the previous year.

Mya has also been working hard with Pat Wilder on the Young Birder Scheme, continuing the grants scheme to help young people access our interest. They are our future.

Our press and social media output has been active in the year, delivered by Pat Wilder, Val Bentley and Adam Huttly. We are reviewing our social media presence and will become more prominent on the emerging platform Bluesky.

Jonno Cook – M&P Chair

YOUNG BIRDERS SCHEME

In 2024, Pat Wilder and I launched the Society's Young Birders Scheme, with the support of Council. Designed for individuals aged 16-25 who live or study in Sussex, the scheme offers grants of up to £500 to help young people pursue their passion or interest in ornithology. These grants can be used for training opportunities, essential equipment such as binoculars or scopes, or transport costs. Additionally, Opticron generously donated 20 pairs of binoculars to be distributed among successful applicants.

The scheme aims to remove barriers, enabling young people to develop their ornithological skills. When we launched, we were uncertain about the level of interest it would generate, but we were delighted to receive an enthusiastic response with numerous requests for application forms.

In 2024, nine applicants were successfully awarded support, receiving binoculars, scopes, funding for training courses, and assistance with transport expenses. Furthermore, they had the opportunity to participate in an engaging in-person bird identification training session led by Council member Tony Benton.

The feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive. Looking ahead to 2025, we are excited to expand the scheme further, with the goal of building a thriving community of young birders who are passionate about conserving Sussex's birds.

Mya Bambrick – Scheme Co-ordinator

NEW YEAR BIRD RACE

I reckon there must have been a record total of participants this year, 70 members in 20 different teams; the winners were the Hot Shot Harriers (alias Tim Squire and Matt Eade) who managed to

find 115 different species on New Year's Day. There was an excellent combined total of 146 species seen, 17 more than in 2023, 16 by all teams – surprisingly not including Dunnock and Wren - and 16 were exclusive to a single team. Over half the teams ticked off wintering Chiffchaff, but Blackcap didn't feature. Two teams managed to catch up with the Long-billed Dowitcher, so I had to add another row to my spreadsheet! Almost £2,100 (including gift aid) was raised for the Society's conservation funds, so a huge thank you is due to all who took part.

Val Bentley – Bird Race Organiser

PRESS & PUBLICITY

During the year I have submitted various bird related articles, both specifically about the Society's activities and promoting the Society in more general articles. I used the story of the cliff fall at Splash Point in February to highlight our concern at the possible effect on the Kittiwake colony. The Young Birders Scheme was publicised at its launch in the Spring with a follow up article quoting some of the young people who had benefitted from it.

The Society's grants for Swift and House Martin boxes in West Sussex were highlighted, along with an article about Honey-buzzards in the county. A visit to the Sussex Wildlife Trust's reserve at Waltham Brooks provided an opportunity to publicise the £9,300 grant made by SOS for the 'Nofence' grazing project, explaining how it will help provide a range of habitats. An article in the Chichester area Village Magazine promoted membership, using the positive reviews of the Sussex Bird Report 2023. In keeping with the festive season, the changing fortunes of Turtle Doves were highlighted in a short article.

The Society's grants are a topic on which I intend to concentrate next year with a view to promoting interest in the Society from people living in the areas which benefit from the support.

Pat Wilder – Publicity Officer

SOCIAL MEDIA

The Society is currently reviewing its current position about the various Social Media options available. Adam Huttly has taken on the role of developing our offering in this important area. Whilst early days for Adam he has outlined below his early thoughts:

I've tidied up both X and Bluesky with new logos and clean high-res banner images. They look much better, and I have also started a calendar to make sure we are posting each month throughout the year. It's a slow process to gain traction and consistency is key.

X (Twitter) – 3.9k followers (up from 3.85k – all X accounts seem to be reducing with a shift over to Bluesky). Best tweet i.e. not a retweet was about Kestrel and Barn Owls existing in a single box (proving we need good content and stories). Most popular are re- tweets about Honey Buzzards and Hawfinches.

Bluesky - 76 followers – only started 11.12.24.

A new alternative to X with a fast-growing prescription. A lot cleaner now and a lot of local birders and organisations already there. Selsey Birder, a few volunteers, some active Society members, SWT, Southdown's Nation Park etc are all present.

I believe it is worth investing a bit on this as it may end up the new Twitter but for the time being we will run them together and keep under review for 2025.

Facebook

Facebook has 1.8k followers up from 1.6k.

Facebook is reliant on us posting which restricts interaction – people can't post directly on this page for obvious reasons.

General "likes" are very low, below ten per post because content isn't interactive enough but with such a good topic i.e. birds and images it should be more.

Instagram

512 followers up from 408

Seems to get a fairly good rate of likes and interaction. Last post April (understanding this is voluntary position and not a priority)

Works well for images to deliver news and events but needs more work.

Consistency, content and interaction are key to any of the social platforms working.

Adam Huttly – Social Media Co-ordinator

CONFERENCE

On 27th January 2024 members from all over the County gathered for the 45th Annual Conference. For the second year in succession the event was held at Oathall Community College, Haywards Heath. The Conference MC was Adrian Thomas, and our President Chris Corrigan welcomed over 170 members to the event.

The highlights of the event were the presentations by: -

- Barry Yates: Birds of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve
- Mike Ramsey: Local People Helping Swifts
- David Ellin: Encouraging Wildlife on a Working Farm
- Alan Loweth: Broadwater Warren - A 20-year History
- Mya Bambrick: Young Birder Initiatives

The afternoon session featured presentation of the President's and Stonechat Awards. Conference included a wide range of sales and information tables around the venue. Members, as always, generously supported the raffle and the SOS merchandise table. The event generated a net profit of almost £1,800 for the Society. Jonathan ("Jonno") Cook coordinated the recording of our speakers' presentations, which have been made available on the Society's YouTube channel.

Positive feedback was received from members. Once again, kindest thanks to everyone who assisted - on the day and in preparation for the Conference - making this such a successful event. We are now looking forward to the 2025 event, which will again take place at Oathall Community College, on 25th January.

David Porter – Conference Organiser

ARCHIVES

There has been only one significant addition to the paper archive this year which was the full version of the paper by Alan Perry on "The Wealden Heaths Breeding Bird Survey 1998-2022", previously published in an abbreviated form in the 2022 Bird Report. As before the pre-2004 paper archives are housed in the West Sussex County Record Office in Chichester where they can be seen by pre-arranged appointment with the County Archivist. Otherwise, the electronic archive has continued to be updated regularly with the minutes of Council and other committee meetings together with the relevant supporting documents.

Mark (CMV) Wright – Archive Officer

NEWSLETTER

We have been looking at refreshing the newsletter's design to include more images and more colour and encouraging as many members as possible to switch to an e-newsletter to get the most out of the changes.

Printing and posting the newsletter is one of the Society's largest annual expenses. At present we print 1,200 copies of each issue, with printing costs of over £700, plus postage and handling totalling around £1,000. Since 2020 the total cost has been £35,500 and we'd like to reduce this so we can support more conservation initiatives.

We are not phasing out the printed version of our newsletter as we know not all members use email, but we are looking at the example of other societies whose newsletters are increasingly online.

One immediate change is that for cost reasons we will no longer publish a separate walks programme. Details of all the walks will be published in the newsletter, and full information including risk assessments will also be on the website.

I'm very grateful to former editors Martin Daniel and Anthony Holden for their advice, and to Val Bentley, Audrey Wende and Richard Durn for their support in the production process over the past year. The newsletter continues to benefit from high quality submissions of articles and photographs by our members – please keep sending them!

Thalia Griffiths – Newsletter Editor

WEBSITE

As was the case last year, most of the work carried out on the website during 2024 went on behind the scenes, so, in terms of a viewer's experience, not a lot changed.

The Society maintains a database of all its members' details. In 2023, this was moved from PC-based storage to the cloud-based Microsoft system. During 2024 improvements were made to the website's member registration/renewal process (a product called MemberPress) so that, in 2025, all members in the database, irrespective of how they joined the Society, will be able to log in to the website. This means that we will be able to create a members-only area on the site where extra content will be available.

During the latter half of 2024, discussions were started about the possibility of embarking on a major website revamp - the current site being now nearly six years old and starting to look a little dated. We're pleased to say that in December 2024 we started discussions with a website development company to plan the look of the new site.

Although not strictly relevant to the website (a separate site in its own right) we also maintain an online archive containing all the Society's documents. This website was built using a technology that will soon be unsupported, so in December 2024, the entire archive was migrated into cloud-based Microsoft storage.

Finally, as always thanks go to the Sightings Team, led by Paul James, for their diligence in keeping the Recent Sightings page up to date.

Chris Brown - Webmaster

MEMBERSHIP

In 2023, the Society introduced a new database with a more robust and secure online electronic membership and payment system using the SharePoint software platform, and this is now working well and able to provide more comprehensive membership information than was previously available. On December 31, 2024, we had 2099 members. This includes 1,897 annual memberships, 169 Life/Joint Life Members, 24 Student/Under 20 members and 7 Honorary Life members. 192 new members have been welcomed to the Society.

We have now implemented free membership for students and Under 20s to encourage an interest in birds and conservation at as early an age as possible and we continue to look at new ways to influence more members to switch to receiving newsletters electronically to help reduce postage costs. We hope that in this modern electronic media age, we can convince more members that money is better spent being put towards the good conservation causes identified by Council than on posting of Newsletters. We are also encouraging members to give permission for us to contact them by email if events requesting our support occur in their local area, and we now distribute a quarterly electronic "New Member Update" flyer to highlight the various activities of the Society to all new e-members in their first year of membership.

Once again it has been a real team effort this year, so thank you to the Treasurer and everyone in Membership and Publicity for the huge amount of work that continues to go into making this such an exciting organisation to be a part of.

Chris Davis – Membership Secretary

OUTINGS

The 2024 Outings Programme booklet listed 28 outings: a selection of 24 outings in East or West Sussex for members on Saturdays or Sundays plus two Friday evening outings for 'birds of the evening' and two outings into Kent (to RSPB Dungeness). There were also 11 midweek walks, providing members with a selection of 39 outings in total (although unfortunately it was necessary to cancel the Thorney Island Walk).

Many outings attracted double figure participation with particularly popular outings including for example: Rye Harbour (18); West Rise Marsh (32); Dungeness (22); Arun Valley & The Burgh (20);

River Ouse Valley (21); Newhaven (22); Seaford Seawatch (25 including members of the Ashdown Bird Group); Pulborough Brooks (20). New for 2024 outings included: Arun Valley and The Burgh; Medmerry; River Ouse Valley. We were also able to welcome new Leaders.

As always, the Outings Programme was designed to provide as many members as possible a sociable opportunity to see a good selection of the variety of birds and habitats available. In 2024 birds seen on our Outings included: Brent Goose; Bewick Swan; Black-throated, Red-throated and Great Northern Diver; Kittiwake, Fulmar, Gannet; Yellow-legged Gull; Red-legged and Grey Partridge; Marsh Harrier, Red Kite, Goshawk, Peregrine, Merlin, White-tailed Eagle, Sparrowhawk; Red-Breasted Merganser, Pintail, Goldeneye; Nightjar; Nightingale; Corn Bunting, Yellowhammer and Purple Sandpiper.

Finally, once again it was pleasing to welcome new members, new participants, younger members and potential new members to our Outings.

Dr Mark Wright – Outings Organiser

SUSSEX ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Registered Charity 256936 www.sos.org.uk

Minutes of the sixty-second AGM of the SUSSEX ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY held at Adastra Hall Hassocks on 13 April 2024 at 14:30.

- 1) Welcome and Apologies for Absence.** President Chris Corrigan took the chair and welcomed 35 members to the AGM (meeting quorate). Apologies were received from 11 members.
- 2) Approval of The Minutes of the 61st AGM held on 1 April 2023** were proposed by Tony Benton and seconded by Audrey Wende and carried unanimously.
- 3) Adoption of the Officials & Members report for year ended 31 December 2023.** This had been circulated ahead of the meeting. Chris Corrigan summarised a few of the successes for the year including: -
 - An excellent and informative Bird Report
 - Great work on Bird Surveys
 - Great conference with new organiser David Porter
 - Continued excellent newsletters with new editor Thalia Griffiths
 - Good progress on Conservation with big adjustments necessary after the loss of Richard Cowser
 - Clare Buckle leading Council extremely well in her first year as Chair with great progress made particularly with the Risk review

Chris expressed his thanks to all the Trustees and other volunteers who had contributed to a very successful year for the Society.

Adoption of the report was proposed by Alan Perry seconded by Mark Mallalieu and carried unanimously.

- 4) Adoption of the Financial Statement and Trustees Report for year ended 31 December 2023.** The Society Treasurer, Ted Merrikin gave a summary of the financial position and performance for 2023 which show income of £76,934 (2022 £39,232) the principal difference being 2 significant donations received in 2023 totalling £40,000. Net income after donations was £14,859, Net Current Assets stood at £91,432, principally Cash at Bank of £133,231 less Creditors (committed donations) of £46,908. As at the AGM date Net Current Assets had increased to £115,342.

There was a question from the floor asking what plans Council had for spending some of our cash and specifically if we had contacted organisations that might need donations. It was explained that Council was looking closely at the situation, we had recently launched the 'Young Birders Scheme' and that it was on the agenda for a full discussion at the forthcoming Council meeting on 30 April 2024.

Overall, the Society is in a strong financial position. Adoption of the report was proposed by Peter Plant seconded by Ken Smith and adopted unanimously.

- 5) Retiring members of Council.** After 8 years on Council Mark Mallalieu has decided to stand down as Chair of the Scientific Committee and from Council. Mark is currently Editor of the Sussex Bird Report and was previously the County Recorder. The meeting extended its thanks to Mark for his time on Council and was pleased to learn that he will continue in his role as Bird Report Editor.
- 6) Election of Officers.** Clare Buckle (Chair), Jonno Cook (Chair of M&P) and Alan Swetman (Secretary) are all eligible without nomination and offer themselves for election. Elected unanimously.
- 7) Re-election of Officers.** Ted Merrikin (Treasurer) has completed his current term of office and offers himself for re-election. Proposed Alan Swetman seconded Jonno Cook. Elected unanimously.
- 8) Election of new Officer.** Chas Holt offers himself for election as Chair of Scientific. Proposed Mark Mallalieu seconded Clare Buckle. Elected unanimously.
- 9) Election of Members of Council –** Katie Nethercoat, Tony Benton and Elsa Heath are all eligible without nomination and offer themselves for election. Elected unanimously.
- 10) Re-election of Members of Council –** Mya Bambrick & Jon Curson have completed their terms as Members of Council and offer themselves for re-election. Proposed Pat Wilder seconded Jonno Cook. Elected unanimously.
- 11) Election of new Members of Council –** Pat Wilder and Susan Kerry Bedell offer themselves as members of Council. Proposed Clare Buckle seconded Alan Swetman. Elected unanimously.
- 12) Appointment of Kreston Reeves** as examiners of the 2024 Accounts. Proposed Ted Merrikin second Alan Swetman. Appointed unanimously.
- 13) Any other business –** None

Meeting closed at 3.00.

Sussex Barn Owl Group 2024 field activity.

The group installed a further 9 boxes in locations across East and West Sussex. 8 being 'A' frame boxes and one 'chest' box installed in a barn.

Following installation work, and later during the breeding season, June through to late August, 220 boxes were visited, 125 of which were occupied, 97 by Barn Owls.

Other occupants included Stock Dove, Jackdaw, Kestrel, Tawny Owl and Mandarin Duck. 227 Barn Owl chicks and 14 adults were ringed with metal and colour rings.



Barn Owl A frame box installation



protection.

Little Owl box awaiting occupancy

Tawny Owls

12 new boxes were installed and 12 existing boxes visited in which 15 chicks and 5 adults were ringed with BTO metal rings. Tawny Owl boxes are monitored in April and May.

Chimney design Tawny Owl Box



Little Owls

In 2024 we commenced Little Owl box installations, erecting 11 bespoke boxes in East Sussex. Little Owl numbers have declined by almost 70% in forty years! They require conservation support as being an introduced species they are not offered any additional