

MINUTES
Oxford Ornithological Society Annual General Meeting

10th May 2017, 19:45 – 20:20
Exeter Hall, Kidlington

The meeting was attended by 50 members and was chaired by Sir Clive Elliott.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Jacqueline and Peter James, Jone Ayres, Graham Lenton, Roy Overall and Wendy Black.

2. President's opening remarks

Clive Elliott remarked on the good year that the OOS had enjoyed, comparing it with a less satisfactory year for tree sparrows and other birds because of the unusually dry weather. He thanked each of the committee members for their work in supporting the OOS.

3. Minutes of 2016 Annual General Meeting

The minutes were approved by Clive Elliott and accepted by unanimous vote.

Proposer: Jon Uren.

Secunder: Neil Livingstone.

4. Matters arising

None.

5. Secretary's report

Caroline Coleman presented the Secretary's report for 2016-2017. A full version of the report is appended.

6. Treasurer's report

Eric Dunford presented the Treasurer's report for 2016-2017. A full version of the report and accounts are appended.

The accounts were accepted unanimously by those present.

Proposer: Graham Coleman.

Secunder: Alison Weaver.

7. Election of independent examiner of accounts

Jon Uren was elected unanimously as independent examiner of the accounts for the Society.

Proposer: Graham Coleman.

Secunder: Andy Gosler.

8. Conservation Officer's report

Alan Larkman presented the Conservation Officer's report for 2016-2017. A full version of the report is appended.

9. Resignations and election of Committee members

Caroline Coleman stood down as Secretary. Barry Hudson was the only nominee to take over this post and was elected unanimously.

Proposer: George Candelin.

Secunder: Janet Persson.

The other current Committee members were elected unanimously.

Proposer: Pat Wixey.

Secunder: Anthony Cheke.

10. Other matters for discussion (submitted in advance)

None.

11. Any Other Business

None.

12. Chairman's closing remarks

Clive Elliott thanked everybody for attending and closed the AGM.

Secretary's Report 2016-2017

I'll start with a review of our indoor talks over the past year. Our meeting place, here at Exeter Hall, continues to provide a suitable, roomy place for our meetings. Thanks to Kidlington Parish Council and the caretakers for their help in preparing the rooms and helping to tackle problems, particularly with the sound system. Tea and coffee sales, expertly organised by Marie-Thérèse Elliott, Rosemary Lenton and Alethea Creighton, continue to provide financial support to the Society. I think I am right in saying that the cost of the tea, coffee, milk and biscuits is not charged back to the Society.

A very informative talk was given by Dr James Pearce-Higgins for the Bernard Tucker Memorial Lecture. We were grateful for sponsorship received from British Birds and shared a very modest profit with the Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire, with whom the event is jointly organised.

In his first year as Speakers' Secretary, Robin Parsons has arranged an excellent range of interesting indoor talks. He has had something of a baptism of fire, dealing effectively with speakers dropping out and making sure that we have had a replacement to give us a suitable talk.

Steve Alley has again led a series of outdoor events, visiting local sites and some exciting locations further beyond Oxfordshire. His efforts are appreciated by the Society and its participating members.

Our BTO representative, John Melling, has again coordinated surveys across the south of the county including Breeding Bird Surveys and the house martin survey. Last month, he and Ben Carpenter organised and presented a BBS taster day to encourage participation in this important survey.

Our profile at public events has included appearances at the Oxford WildFair and Wychwood Forest Fair. Barry Hudson, John Melling and Robin Parsons kindly represented the OOS at the WildFair in Oxford. Several of us also manned a stand at the Wychwood Forest Fair in September. For the coming year we have decided not to take part in the WildFair because of the effort needed to be there and the low impact we think we can achieve with the people who attend. We did also consider attending Countryfile Live, but also felt that we could not field enough people to cover a stand over the four days of the event. We will be appearing again at the Wychwood Forest Fair and Barry Hudson has been working with Thames Water on arrangements for an open day at Farmoor.

It is with regret that I stand down this year as Secretary, having struggled to find the time to cover this important role. We are fortunate in having a returning candidate, Barry Hudson, who has been an excellent Secretary previously and will continue to keep us all under control. My personal thanks are due to Barry for supporting me and rescuing me when I've started to sink under weight of too many responsibilities. For the time being, I will continue as Minutes Secretary to the committee.

I wish to extend the Society's gratitude to Ian Lewington, who puts together our Bulletins every month and to Janet Persson who mails them out. With the recent publication of a very attractive 2012 annual report, Ian Lewington, Graham Coleman and the team of account-writers are doing a great job - well done to everyone involved. Meanwhile, our webmaster, Ray Bellis, has been busy maintaining and adding to our website.

Barry Hudson and Keith Clack have, for many years, written interesting articles for the Oxford Times. Unfortunately, the Oxford Times has decided to stop publishing these items but we should thank Barry and Keith for their great efforts over many years.

The database of members' bird sightings is held and managed for us by Jon Uren, another person who works behind the scenes on our behalf. This is a detailed and essential task which is not always easy to manage and heartfelt thanks go to Jon for his years of looking after the database for us.

To finish, the Society remains in a strong position with a stable membership base, thanks to all of our members and the many people who work so hard to keep things running smoothly. Thank you.

**Treasurer's Report 2016-2017
Presented by Eric Dunford**

General Fund Receipts and Payments Income decreased by £400 this year, mostly due to a fall in donations. However, this was balanced by a similar drop in expenditure. Again, the speakers were substantially below the budgeted figure, several having waived their fee. This largely accounted for the increase of about £600 in the balance in hand

Membership We now have 293 members (57 of whom are family members), just three down on the year. It is a great help to the Treasurer that 167 pay by Standing Order, which substantially reduces the number of reminders needed! Also of great benefit is that 85% have Gift Aided their membership fees, which adds some £1,500 to our income.

Conservation Special Fund Expenditure was dominated by the provision of bird seed, utilising the Grant money received in 2015. Other items largely balanced out so that the net result was a deficit of £200.

17/18 Budget The Committee has agreed a Budget for 2017/8. Small surpluses have been achieved over the last two years, so the impact of the rising costs of postage and higher speaker's fees should be absorbed without having a serious impact on the funds in hand. The Committee has recommended that membership fees should remain at their current level; namely £6 Students, £15 single and £22 Family Membership.

Again, grateful thanks are due to Jon Uren for carrying out the duties of Independent Examiner and Janet Persson for posting out the monthly Bulletins.

Oxford Ornithological Society **Accounting Statement (Receipts & Payments Basis)**

Section A: General Fund

2016/2017 **2015/2016**

A1: Receipts

A1a: Gifts Donations and Voluntary receipts

Donations Members	372	751
Donations Non Members	152	150
Donations Bernard Tucker Lecture	170	144
Subscriptions	4,711	4,742
Gift Aid	1,482	1,548
Refreshments Donations	270	265
Bernard Tucker Lecture Sponsorship	100	100

A1b: Receipts from Trading Activities

Annual Report Sales	50	40
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A1c: Receipts earned from Assets

Interest Barclays	127	137
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Total Receipts from Section A

7,433 **7,877**

<u>Oxford Ornithological Society</u>	<u>2016/17</u>	<u>2015/16</u>	<u>Notes</u>
<u>A2a: Payments</u>			
<u>A2: Payments directly for Charitable Purposes</u>			
Indoor Meetings Hall Hire	1,458.00	1,336.00	
Speakers Fees	203.00	273.00	
Annual Report	1,445.00	2,092.00	1
Programme Cards	126.91	126.91	
Envelopes and Labels for Bulletin	46	132	
Bulletin Production	1,299	1,317	
Postage for Bulletins and Annual Report	1,497	1,560	
Refreshments Costs	0	0	
Subscription to ONCF	15	15	
A2: Payments for publicity, fund raising, Management and admin			
Liability Insurance	113	113	
Bernard Tucker expenses	182	177	
ANHS share of BTL Surplus	44	34	
Website	57	57	
Total Payments for Section 2	6,487	7,232	
Total Income A1	7,433	7,958	
<u>Net Receipts/(Payments) –A1- A2</u>	<u>947</u>	<u>726</u>	
A3: Cash Funds last year	9,833	9,106	
<u>Cash Fund this year</u>	<u>10,779</u>	<u>9,833</u>	

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Note 1: £500 was given towards the On-line Atlas in 15/16

Oxford Ornithological Society Accounting Statement (Receipts & Payments Basis)

Section B: Special Fund **2016/17** **2015/16** **Notes**

B1 Receipts:

B1a: Gifts Donations and Voluntary Receipts

Oxford Times Articles	480	0	see D2
TOE/ Smith			
Grants	0	5,480	
Donations to Tree Sparrow Project	250	1,083	

B1b: Receipts from Trading Activities

Sale of Publications	11	5	
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<u>Total Receipts earned from Assets</u>	<u>741</u>	<u>6,568</u>	
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B2 Payments

B2a: Payments directly for Charitable purposes

Publications			
Tree Sparrow Project	1,675	1,789	
Barn Owl Project	674	596	
Hobby Project	200	300	
<u>Total Payments</u>	<u>2,548</u>	<u>2,685</u>	

Net of Receipts/ (Payments)	-1,808	3,883	
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**Conservation Report
Alan Larkman**

First, let me start with an apology. At last year's AGM, I indicated that I might not be presenting further conservation reports and that this task would be taken over by Barry Hudson. However, life on the OOS Committee has more twists and turns than an old garden hose, and it looks as though Barry is taking on different responsibilities as we will hear in a few minutes time, so I'm afraid it's me again. As in previous years, the conservation work that the Society has been most closely associated with has centred around owls, Hobbies and small farmland birds, and I will try to give you a brief overview of the past year's activities.

Starting with Barn Owls, Pat Wixey and his team have continued their work in providing, maintaining and monitoring Barn Owl nest boxes. The fortunes of Barn Owls are generally closely linked to the availability of field voles, their main prey, and Pat says that voles struggled to breed in real numbers in 2016 and it was not a great year for Barn Owls. Nonetheless, his team managed the Herculean task of performing some 200 site visits to 164 separate boxes, a considerable increase on the 155 visits they made the year before. These boxes fledged in excess of 100 young last year, again a substantial increase on the total of 53 from 2015. The earliest brood was ringed on the 21st of June, and the last on the 25th of October. Pat describes the landowner's reaction to this last brood as ecstatic, because this was the first season after the box had been put up and it was the first box on her estate. The largest broods were four broods of 4 owlets each. Pat's team put up 5 additional boxes last year and replaced a further 4.

On a sad note, Pat records his gratitude and appreciation to Ian Anderson, who passed away in June 2016. Ian had been assisting Pat since 2004 and his help was absolutely indispensable during the years when Pat's arthritic knees restricted his own ability to access nest boxes.

A change to the Barn Owl work this year is that a cluster of 17 nest boxes close to the A420 have been allocated to Alli Bunning and her partner Martin for ongoing monitoring and maintenance; they will continue to report back to Pat or George Candelin at the end of each breeding season. Pat would like to thank the OOS for their financial support, Sue Morrish at High Cogges Farm for the loan of her farm building, all the other farmers and landowners involved, and in particular Albert Allen for his vital assistance.

In West Oxfordshire, Pat works alongside Andrew Freeman to help and monitor nesting Hobbies. During the summer of 2016, 7 pairs of Hobbies returned to the nest sites, of which 4 were successful, producing 2 young apiece. Pat described this as only a mediocre breeding season, although by my reckoning this compares favourably with the previous year. Three of the pairs chose to breed in artificial nests put up in what Pat describes as hair-raising style by Andrew. I can personally testify to Andrew's tree-climbing skill and nerve!

Our project to provide nest boxes and year-round feeding for Tree Sparrows and winter food for other small farmland birds has continued, and I would like to express my gratitude to Barry Hudson, Clive Elliott, Albert Allen (and yes, that is the same Albert Allen who works so hard alongside Pat Wixey with the Barn Owls), Sally Taylor and her family, Bill Haynes, David Bury, Phil Barber and Martin Corley, as well as the helpful farmers and all the other people who have put in the considerable effort needed to keep the project going for another year.

This brings me to the vexed topic of funding for conservation projects. For several years, the Tree Sparrow project relied on personal donations from those running the project and others. For the last 2 years, we have been fortunate in having a grant provided via the Landfill Tax Credits scheme. However, this grant will finish later this year, so one of my priorities is to try to have the grant renewed for at least another 2-year period. For some years now, the OOS has provided financial support, albeit at a modest level, for the Barn Owl and Hobby work, and every year I stress to OOS members that this money does not come out of their annual subscriptions but rather from a separate Ringing and Conservation fund. This fund has been topped up by money earned by the writing of a regular column on birds in the Oxford Times, initially by John Brucker and recently by Barry Hudson and Keith Clack, to whom we are very grateful. Last year I told you about how these columns had recently expanded to occupy more space and prominence, enhanced by excellent photographs taken by members of the Society, notably Roger Wyatt. Well, they say that pride often goes before a fall, and in March this year Barry Hudson received a fateful e-mail from Tim Hughes, the Features Editor of the Oxford Times. There followed a brief e-mail exchange, and, as is often the case with OOS matters in which Barry is involved, a certain amount of humour entered the situation. If you can bear with me for a few moments, I'll try to give you a shortened version of the saga.

Tim Hughes wrote:

Thanks again for the birding page in this week's Oxford Times – more great pictures and a well-deserved dig at poor farming practices. The birds page has become a favourite of mine over the years. However, as I'm sure you are aware, budgets are under ever tighter pressure, and savings have to be made. Unfortunately, I fear the time has come for the birds page to have a little rest. Thanks for your efforts and hard work over the year. It's going to be hard to replace that page.

Best wishes,

Tim.

To which Barry replied:

Your e-mail, sacking Clackers and myself, came like a stooping Peregrine from out of the blue. I guess the welfare of our local birdlife will now be even more reliant on a few dedicated supporters who will no doubt be putting their hands even deeper into our pockets.

Thanks for all your help.

Barry.

Tim Hughes replied:

Hi, Barry.

I know – it's awful... and I'm sorry if I have ruffled your feathers, as it were.

I came at this less like a Peregrine in for the kill than like a starving Robin, sadly unable to feed its chicks. I hope we can revive the page – in fact I am sure we can.

You chaps have provided sterling work, and yes, I know £40 is a small sum for all you do.

All the best,

Tim.

So there is some hope. I have tried to get a Landfill grant for this work as well, but neither Barn Owls nor Hobbies are red-listed species, so the Tax Credits scheme cannot give grants for their conservation. However, I should stress that there is still some money left in the ringing and conservation fund, and the level of support we provide is so modest that it should last for a few years yet, while we work on an alternative source of funds.

Although not directly supported by OOS funds, members of the Society are involved in several extremely worthwhile conservation projects, and I'll just mention a couple of them. The project at City Farm, Eynsham, involving Ian Lewington, Barry Hudson and myself, achieved recognition this year when it was designated as a Site of European Importance for its assemblage of rare arable plants, which are important sources of seed food for small farmland birds. The bad news is that at least part of the site is now under threat of housing development. Another effort that has received long overdue recognition recently is the work done for Swift conservation by Chris Mason. Chris has put in a huge amount of work for Swifts over many years, and it was great to see his work highlighted in the latest edition of the RSPB's magazine 'Nature's Home' as part of their 'Swift City' project for Qxford. I was slightly less delighted when I read the piece on the RSPB website that described the long-term monitoring work on the Swift colony at the Natural History Museum without mentioning the role of our Society in that study. Still, you can't have everything.

Finally, the threat to City Farm that I mentioned emphasises the ongoing threat that rampant housing development poses to our birds and many valuable wildlife sites throughout the county. Sadly, changes to the planning system mean that there is rather little that we can do to prevent it. I'm sorry to end on a downbeat note.