

## **MINUTES OF LBC COMMITTEE MEETING: NOV 28, 2017 at 7.30pm**

### **PRESENT**

Phil Espin (chair), Colin Casey, Andrew Chick, John Clarkson, Mike Harrison, Ian Macalpine-Leny, Bill Sterling, Jim Wright

### **APOLOGIES**

John Watt, Phil Hyde, Grahame Hopwood

### **MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 5 MEETING**

Agreed to be a true record subject to a comment by Ian M-L that his request for an index in the next annual bird report be noted.

### **MATTERS ARISING**

PE welcomed new committee members Colin Casey, who has taken responsibility for modernising and enhancing the website, and Jim Wright who has agreed to take over as secretary at least until the AGM in March.

In reply to a query by JWg, about whether there had been any progress on installation of a LBC sales cabinet at RSPB Frampton, AC observed that the proposal was still under consideration and would be subject to agreement from warden John Bradley and prospective cabinet maker Keith Seaton.

On the possibility of the LBC having representation on a stand at next year's Birdfair, MH said he had approached Nicholas Watts about space being available on the Vine House Farm birdseed sales stand. However, the response, though courteous, had not been encouraging. The option remains to approach the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust about a section of their Birdfair stand being available.

CC maintained that a social media campaign was likely to be the most effective means of recruiting new members- with the advantage that it would cost nothing. At present, the club provided little incentive to recruit members because most of the information was already just as readily available to non-members as to members.

PE said he had contacted Chris Gunn about holding a joint LBC/ BTO conference next autumn, but this is now not likely to be a starter until spring 2019 at the earliest.

PE confirmed that the Editor of *British Birds*, Roger Riddington, formerly of Lincolnshire but now living in Shetland, had agreed to be guest speaker at the AGM on March 20. He said Phil Hyde was to be congratulated on arranging this. AC agreed, describing it as "a massive coup".

### **NEW WEBSITE AND ASSOCIATED DEVELOPMENTS**

Retiring Webmaster AC commended returning committee member CC on the massive amount of work he had done in upgrading and modernising the website which was due to

be relaunched shortly. He said it was important that the club looked forward to the future, not back to the past.

CC described the discussions he had had with members about what was required, the feedback he had received and some of the technical aspects of the work he had undertaken.

The project was necessary and urgent because of the vulnerability of the existing system to spam/hacking activity which could crash it irretrievably.

It would not be possible to transfer old records to the new system, but they would be retained and locked at *LBCarchives.co.uk*

Teething problems had been encountered with the Gallery where a few instances had been detected of images being captioned with incorrect species names, but this glitch was being addressed.

CC confirmed the new website was “almost ready to go live”.

One of the improvements will be the facility for members to renew online by credit/debit card. Up to three reminders will be sent out to members when their renewal falls due. This facility will make the site much more user-friendly for recruiting new members who will be saved the inconvenience of printing out and posting a membership form.

MH said it was important for the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust to be kept up to speed with arrangements because of their existing involvement in aspects of the membership process. He further observed that some members preferred to renew by cheque, cash or even postal order. PE has discussed the position with JWa and they will visit Wilma Gammon at LWT before the end of January to ensure she is fully incorporated into and comfortable with the new processes.”

IM-L expressed caution about any downgrading of the existing rolling direct debit system which he feared might lead to loss of membership. However, BS said direct debit was “detested” by Grimsby area members. CC noted that direct debit resulted in loss of member-control over how their bank accounts were being debited. AC said potential new members would be more likely to join if they could do so “instantaneously”. He said members who failed to renew would forfeit the right to submit posts. The important thing was for the new website to be regarded as such a valuable resource that membership would be deemed almost essential.

CC went on to discuss the proposed newsletter, the first edition of which will be emailed exclusively to existing members to coincide with the launch of the modernised website. This will consist of up to 40 pages of content - news, features, interviews and photographs - as contributed by members. Most of this will be local in nature but some of it will be national or even international. The first edition will include a letter to members from the club chairman. In it, PE will highlight the main features of the new website and its scope for furthering both the fortunes of the club and of birding both within the county

and beyond. Among the articles in the first editions will be one on the growing significance of drone technology in monitoring bird distribution and populations within a range of habitats. CC will be overseeing the launch of the newsletter, but the intention is for there to be an editorial board to ensure diversity of content.

CC further discussed conversations with Colin and Sheila Jennings aimed at modernising Database Records. The intention is for content from Birdtrack to be transferred to Wildlife Recorder, then imported to the LBC database which will be streamlined so that there is one master system rather than a proliferation of different systems.

CC paid tribute to an associate, Jack Levene, whose time and technical expertise had been invaluable in writing code to make Birdtrack and e-bird data entry automatic which should save Colin and Sheila considerable time consuming work. It was agreed JL should be paid £200 for his work when it is completed.

### **TREASURER'S REPORT**

Good wishes were expressed for the recovery of JWa who is recuperating from an operation. He had supplied a statement of LBC finances as of November 26. Publication of the report is the main cost (£4,534 compared with £4,165 the previous year), but the club is continuing to profit from strong data sales - up from £2,939 last year to £3,847 this year. PE confirmed the club was in sound financial state with a current working balance of £1,519.

### **SECRETARY'S REPORT**

JWg said he had received email correspondence from Valeria Castro of the British Embassy in Costa Rica which is keen to make consular and other advice available to birders visiting CR and/or neighbouring Nicaragua. Once this information has been compiled, she will submit it to be considered for inclusion on the LBC website or in the newsletter.

### **SALES SECRETARY'S REPORT**

BS reported sales of 15 copies of the report since the last meeting, but, overall, sales were "slow". He had emailed a list of schools provided by Rob Carr, but there had been only one expression of interest - from Tollbar Academy in Waltham who had been supplied with a copy. However, no response had been forthcoming. There followed a general discussion about possible sales outlets (such as shops, reserve visitor centres and online sites), pricing and related matters. Unsold copies are being stored safely in the loft of BS' home, but he would welcome any ideas or initiatives from members that might act as a catalyst to increase sales. BS further noted that the post office in Healing, where he lives, was being downgraded and potential loss of a customer desk would be unhelpful when it came to posting out copies in the future.

### **MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT**

MH said three prospective new members were "in the pipeline" but overall membership remained static at between 240 and 300. This compared unfavourably with, say, the Lincolnshire Butterfly Group which has 400-plus members. CC and JC noted that the

LBG had an affiliation with the national organisation, Butterfly Conservation, providing both with the opportunity for cross-promotion. CC suggested that the factionalism that occurred in pockets the county birding community was not a factor among butterfly enthusiasts. Ian said membership of the Lincolnshire Naturalists' Union had for a long time stood at about 200. He queried the average age of committee members of LBC. MH said change was needed in order for the LBC membership to increase.

## **COUNTY RECORDER SOUTH'S REPORT**

PH was unable to attend for family reasons but provided progress reports as follows:

### **(a) LBR 2016**

Writing of the species accounts is underway as follows:

Grebes; golden & grey plovers, lapwing; swallows & martins; Sabine's, BH & little gulls, kittiwake; diving ducks & sawbills; woodpeckers; wren & starlings; Montague's harrier, woodlark & nightjar; RL partridge; divers, petrels & shearwaters; barn, little & tawny owls'; ring ouzel; pied/white wagtails; blue, great, coal, willow, marsh & LT tits; turnstone, curlew sand, purple sand & sanderling.

### **(b) Contentious/ scarce LBRC records submissions**

The contentious scarce / rare reports without descriptions have been sorted by Andrew Henderson (AH) and checked/validated by PAH. This is an enormous task (1700+ rows in his spread sheet) and needs streamlining before 2017.

I've e-mailed various suggestions to make the process of records submissions more pro-active. In particular, I'd like to see on the home page of the new website a records submissions "box" with a strap-line of (say) "Please submit your records for the current year now". Include two buttons in this box: (a) List of LBRC description species and (b) on-line LBRC submission form. Button (b) would aim to get a minimum data set of species, dates present, site & observer. This is more than we get at present from the details AH accumulates on his spreadsheet.

### **(c) LBRC species list**

I think this list needs to be re-visited as some of the species we currently ask for descriptions for we *never* get and we rely on observer provenance. For example, there were 214 rows of data on Water Pipit, and no one to my knowledge has ever submitted a description. Our main point of reference for accepting these has been numbers cited on the blogs for Frampton Marsh and GPBO, plus observer provenance.

Other species such as GW Egret, Common Crane, Black Brant and BT Diver also cause problems. So....as the submission of descriptions seems unlikely to increase, I think one way forward (please suggest others) is to have the Records Submission box I have outlined in (b), above.

### **(d) New LBC website**

Colin Casey (CC) will provide you with the main updates. From my point of view and involvement, the main attention has been given to uploading species accounts, photos and histogram data as per recent LBC annual reports. This process is ongoing and won't be completed for several months. Photos are in from Brent Goose, the first species in IOC order, down to Night Heron with omissions for a few such as petrels and most shearwaters where there appear to be no in-county photos that I can find.

PH's points were duly noted. In ensuing discussion, PE noted that it would spread the workload of compiling the annual report if more members volunteered to write up individual species. At the last count, most of these (34 per cent) had been done by Editor Andrew Henderson (34 per cent), followed by PH (14 per cent), Chris Grimshaw (12 per cent) and PE (10 per cent). PE queried the need for too much description about species which are not difficult to identify. JC said "observer confidence" remained an important factor in determining the credibility of records. There was a discussion about whether a reported sighting of a Great White Egret could be accepted if seen flying across the road of a motorist driving at 40mph. The consensus was that it should be rejected.

### **COUNTY RECORDER NORTH'S REPORT**

JC said he had been further approached by Geoff Williams about LBC having no reserves. JC felt there was an opportunity at Manby Flashes if an LBC work party could be organised to help maintain and manage it. He had recently helped to repair the hide which had been damaged by vandalism. For the LBC to be associated with such a project would be a way of showcasing the club and its activities. It was agreed that the matter should be pursued with Martin Chapman who oversees Manby Flashes.

PE said he would like the club to have a seawatching hide at Mablethorpe and wondered if one of the beach chalets might be available for conversion. As well as providing a viewing point for birds, the footfall of passing residents and holidaymakers might be a means of promoting the club and attracting new members.

BS said on his recent birding visit to Israel he had been impressed at the way an old railway wagon had been converted to a hide. PE said obtaining planning permission for such a venue in Mablethorpe might be challenging

### **WEBMASTER'S REPORT**

IM-L noted that it was customary for LBC to provide a speaker for the joint annual LNU-LBC conference. The 2018 event is to be held at Whisby, Lincoln, on January 20. AC said he would volunteer to give a talk entitled *Lincolnshire Rooks: Living in the Shadow of Ash Dieback*. This will look at 70 years of rook studies in Lincolnshire, starting with the 1947 LNU Transaction paper and compare the situation then with the results of this year's LBC survey on rookeries based on data, most of it from the south of the county. Within 251 individual rookeries, a total of 5,959 nests had been counted - 5,322 assignable to a specific species of tree. Since the demise of the favoured English elm as a

result of Dutch elm disease, rooks now preferred sycamores, followed by ash, with a few records of nests occurring in *leylandii* and Corsican pine. With ash vulnerable to *Chalara* dieback disease, sycamore is likely to become increasingly important as a rookery habitat. The survey will resume in spring next year, and the findings are likely to be the subject of a report which may be submitted to the BTO as well as to LBC publications. They should provide an important early insight into the potential impact that *Chalara* dieback is starting to have on Lincolnshire wildlife.

Earlier this month, AC was a guest speaker at the annual Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership where he described how usage of bird data has increased since records were incorporated into Lincolnshire Environmental Record Centre and of its value to developers. MH, a conference delegate, said the talk had been well received by conference delegates. In response to a query from Colin and Sheila Jennings, PE confirmed that records would be used on the basis of the taxonomic list approved by the IOC.

There was discussion between committee members, chiefly AC and CC, over whether tweets containing the text @Lincsbirding could be retweeted to the LBC website automatically. CC felt this was possible, but AC thought otherwise. At present, tweets are retweeted individually by either him or one of five others.

AC mentioned Colin and Sheila may need a new pc to hold all LBC records. CC said he would evaluate exactly what they needed on his next visit and it was agreed a new machine would be provided if needed.

### **AOB**

MH reported that he had been approached by David Ballance, of Minehead, who had expressed interest in data collected some years ago for a county bird atlas that was thought to have been at an “advanced stage” in 2001 but was never published. He was prepared to produce a book that he would have bound for presentation to the library of the BTO’s Thetford HQ. AC said he had possession of the species data in electronic form, but the maps relied on an outdated software program, Corel Draw. Time permitting, he and CC will explore whether it is possible to produce print out the data requested by Mr Ballance.

MH passed on some archive material to AC to assess whether any of it was worth retaining.

MH asked about obtaining barn owl boxes in response to request from individuals who had located three potentially suitable sites. AC said the cost of purpose-built boxes was upwards of £60, but he would be happy to supply two old ammunition boxes (obtained under licence) for conversion. JC suggested that the LBC might seek to benefit from favourable publicity if this project proceeds. He said the partnership between LBC and St James’ Church, Louth, had worked to the advantage of both organisations.

### **DATE AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING**

This will be at 7.30pm on Tuesday February 6 at a venue to be arranged. The normal location, the Admiral Rodney Hotel, has increased the room hire rate from £40 to £65 so alternative sites will be explored - possibly (following a suggestion by MH) a room at The Coach and Horses pub in Hemingby.

The meeting closed at 9.50pm.