

Norfolk Ornithologists' Association

Annual General Meeting 14th September 2024 at 3.00pm, in Holme Village Hall

Trustees present: Steve Newman (in the Chair), David Gamble (Treasurer), Peter Bangs, Jenny Barker, Keith Fox, Lucy Ferrer, Roger Skeen, Ed Tooth.

In attendance: Sophie Barker (Warden), Shannon Clifford (Assistant Warden), Ann Newman (Minutes).

NOA members: Approximately 25 other NOA Members were present.

Steve Newman began by welcoming members to the NOA AGM. In particular he welcomed Shannon Clifford, who had joined the NOA as Assistant Warden in September 2023, and was attending the AGM for the first time. He outlined the agenda for the meeting.

1. Apologies for Absence: David Agombar, Jerry Brown, Michael Rae.

2. The Minutes of the previous AGM

The Minutes of the AGM held on 2nd September 2023 had been made available on the NOA website prior to the present meeting, and were also available on paper at the meeting. Acceptance of the Minutes was proposed by Terry Smith, seconded by Geoff Randall, and approved unanimously by show of hands.

3. Election of Council Members

- a) Ratification of election of co-opted members:
Ed Tooth and Jerry Brown had been co-opted to membership of the Council during the last year; their formal election as Trustees was proposed by Chris Buck, seconded by Terry Smith, and approved unanimously.
- b) Trustees offering themselves for re-election on a rotational basis:
Lucy Ferrer and Keith Fox offered themselves for re-election in accordance with the Constitution. Their re-election was proposed by Ann Gordon, seconded by Bev Randall, and approved unanimously.

4. The Chairman's Report

Steve Newman reported as follows:

- a) Warden: Sophie Barker continues as NOA Warden, based mainly at the Observatory, with regular help from Roger Skeen, Jenny Barker and other volunteer wardens.
- b) Assistant Wardens: Shannon Clifford joined us in September 2023, taking over from Emma Buck, who had left in June 2023. She is based mainly at Hempton and Walsey, but also regularly helps Sophie at the Observatory.
Gary Elton continued as a part-time Assistant Warden until the end of March 2024, when the funding from the Goldcrest Charitable Trust ceased, but he continues to help us as a volunteer ringer.
- c) Trustees: Last year we secured approval at the AGM to increase temporarily the number of Trustees from 9 to 12, to ease development of the NOA's structure. This had already resulted in the appointment of Jerry Brown and Ed Tooth, see item 3(a) above.

- d) Treasurer: Our Treasurer David Gamble wishes to stand down after nearly 20 years, and we are actively seeking a replacement. To this end we have placed an advert on the ICAEW website and made enquiries of individuals, so far without success. We are therefore making enquiries of the membership (via the Autumn Newsletter and the website) hoping that that will identify someone, whether member or acquaintance, with the right skill set. We see the key requirements as being:

Supportive of NOA's aims, (but don't have to be expert birder).

At least basic accounting knowledge.

Able to keep accurate financial records.

Experience of online banking.

6 to 8 hours per week to spare, mostly working from home.

Can commit to us for a few years.

Ideally locally based (8 to 10 council meetings p.a. in north Norfolk).

Good interpersonal skills essential: someone we can all get on with.

- e) Land Purchase at HBO: The NOA is now a landowner at Holme, with three plots of land held in trust by Council members on behalf of the Association. Historically the land has been owned by two organisations, and by two private individuals. During 2023 the two private individuals offered to sell their plots of land to the NOA, but required that the purchases be kept confidential until completion.

The purchases were completed in spring 2024, and NOA now owns more than half the Observatory land area. Everything will look the same at the Observatory, and we won't be changing the way we use the land, but the benefits of land ownership are:

- The Observatory reserve is now owned either by NOA or by one of two organisations with excellent environmental credentials (National Trust and NWT).
- Enhanced security for HBO, with reduced risk of land being sold on the open market.
- NOA can plan for the future with greater confidence.
- NOA may be viewed differently as landowner rather than tenant: potentially greater influence on conservation decisions in north Norfolk.

Money to purchase the pieces of land at HBO had to be taken from our core funds, because of the confidentiality requirement, but an appeal was launched in June 2024 aiming to recoup the money we had spent on the land purchases. The total cost of the purchases was £48,000, but the Appeal was worded so that anything received above £48,000 could be retained and used for charitable purposes (maintenance of our reserves).

At the time of the AGM, the sum received exceeded £55,000, with some eligible for Gift Aid. NOA was very grateful to all the organisations and individuals who had helped make the Appeal such a success.

- f) Finances: Looking at the overall situation, the bank accounts and other investments look very healthy, and the successful land purchase appeal stands us in very good stead.

Nevertheless, there are financial challenges to be faced, including the end of funding from Goldcrest Charitable Trust in 2024, and the anticipated reduction in income from agri-environment grants. There is an ongoing gap between income and expenditure, and inflation bears heavily on small charities such as NOA.

Active fundraising is essential to ensure NOA's financial sustainability. David Agombar is providing expert advice, and avenues to explore include Trusts, Foundations, Individuals, and Legacies (Gifts in Wills).

An Investment Income subgroup has been established to ensure investments are as efficient as possible.

An increase in membership subscriptions will be needed in 2026.

g) 200 Club Promoter: NOA 200 Club is an important part of our fundraising effort each year, raising about £2,000 per annum. Ann Smith has been Promoter since 2016, but she has been seeking to hand over to someone else. Kath Trinder is now in the process of taking over as Promoter. The process is expected to be complete around the time of the next draw in October 2024.

h) Birding And Ringing Highlights

A very wet winter was good for wintering birds on marshes.

Autumn migration in 2023 was largely unremarkable, but there was a big day of visible migration on 8th October, with 90 Grey Herons and 54 Short-eared Owls of particular note. There were thousands of Wigeon and Brent Geese flying west offshore, and HBO's third Arctic Warbler was ringed. The effects of avian 'flu continued to be felt, with few Great Skuas again seen.

A total of 4,243 new birds were ringed in 2023, made up as follows:

HBO	1,368
Walsey Hills	816
Hempton Marsh	412
Other NOA sites	1,647

i) Other Monitoring

Motus tracking remains on the back-burner at present, but thermal imaging is being used successfully by Shannon and Ed to detect hidden birds.

j) Replacement and Maintenance of Infrastructure at Observatory

NOA continues to maintain and improve its infrastructure. The major projects completed during the past year were the replacement of the Heligoland Trap, which now faced East rather than West, reflecting the likely movement of migrant birds; also the replacement of the worn-out ramp from the Disabled Car Park to the main Reserve. Both of these are on the land now owned by NOA.

k) Publications

The NOA Annual Report for 2023 was completed on schedule and would be circulated in late September 2024.

Papers reporting the first confirmed *halimodendri* Lesser Whitethroat for Norfolk were accepted by both *British Birds* and *Norfolk Bird and Mammal Report*.

Recent Newsletter back-page articles:

The Wash Barrage Proposal (Ed Tooth).

Great Northern Divers on Mull (Irene Boston).

Spring Birding on Skye (Steve Newman).

Wildflowers at Holme Bird Observatory (Iain Starke).

6. The Treasurer's Report

David Gamble reported on the 2023 accounts as follows:

The formal accounts for 2023 had now been lodged with the Charity Commission, and could be seen by searching the Commission's website for charity number 267670. To summarise:

Income 2023

Donations and legacies	£12,899
Memberships	£33,435
Fundraising, agri-environment grants etc	£20,445
Investment interest	<u>£7,473</u>
	<u>£74,252</u>

Expenditure 2023

Costs of generating funds	£4,877
Charitable activities	£90,653
Governance	<u>£8,063</u>
	<u>£103,593</u>

NOA's holdings on 9th September 2024 were as follows:

Instant access accounts	£51,836
Notice accounts	£195,671
Term deposits	£109,799
Ethical investment fund	<u>£214,007</u>
	<u>£571,813</u>

7. Thanks

Steve Newman thanked the following on behalf of the Trustees and Wardens:

Goldcrest Charitable Trust: continued funding for our full-time Assistant Warden to Easter 2024.

Rowhire Ltd: funding to cover the costs of printing our annual report.

Everyone who has supported our Land Purchase Appeal.

Our land agent Simon Breasley: guiding us through the land purchases.

John and Nicola Woods: funds enabling construction of Heligoland Trap.

The family of Andrew Williams for further contribution in his memory, used to help fund replacement disabled access ramp at the Obs.

Bob and Jacky Gulliver: packaged our Annual Report ready for mailing.

Peter Stephens: voluntary work at Hempton Marsh.

Ben Rackstraw, Mike Rimmell: weekly help with census data at the Obs.

Roger Skeen, Jenny Barker: regular voluntary work at the Obs.

Dave Nurney: usual series of excellent illustrations for annual report.

Ann Gordon: promoter of our Annual Grand Draw once again; also continued to collect used stamps.

200 Club Promoters: Ann Smith and Kath Trinder.

David Austen: arranged PAT testing and kept an eye on our electrics.

Pete Bangs: regular health and safety checks around the reserves.

Keith Fox, Chris Bryant: ongoing care of our infrastructure.

John and Julie Stroud: continued work on our moth data.

Ann Newman: prepared the annual report for printing, plus other administrative work behind the scenes.

Anybody we've overlooked.

All our members for their continued support.

8. The Wardens' Report

Sophie Barker and Shannon Clifford showed the photographic wildlife highlights of the period from September 2023 to August 2024.

9. Any Other Business

NOA member Martin Runchman asked whether NOA had any plans to make its Annual Reports available in electronic format as well as or in place of the current printed and bound format. Ann Newman replied that a relatively low-resolution PDF was available for those specialist libraries who requested it, but it was not routinely sent to members.

No other business being raised, the AGM concluded, and was followed by **refreshments**, which had been organised by Jenny Barker.