



## **Chair's report for the reporting period 23 March 2021 to 8 March 2022**

### **Introduction**

As I write this, I'm nearing the end of my first year as chair of SDOS. Over the course of that year, COVID - 19 restrictions continued to cast a shadow over some elements of our events programme, particularly indoor meetings which have still not resumed. But we weren't beaten by Covid!

Here are our four Aims for the year and you will see that an enormous amount has been achieved.

### **Aim 1 - To promote the study of birds, especially within the society's recording area**

- With the easing of lock down restrictions, we cautiously restarted our walks and public engagement events. By the end of this reporting period, we had delivered over 22 walks specifically for members; two public/SDOS events at Coronation Green and on the Adur SSSI; and participated in the 'Bees and seas' event at Brooklands, where we engaged with members of the general public.
- We also supported a FoSB birding event on 18 December 21 and a World of Widewater event in early January 2022.
- Our indoor meetings were replaced by Zoom presentations and were generally very well attended. The most popular talk attracted around 70 participants.
- Our Facebook group - Shoreham Birding - has helped us to reach an entirely new audience and more than 775 people have signed up as followers. Approximately eight new SDOS members have been recruited via this route.
- Two highly acclaimed bi-annual newsletters were produced with the Autumn edition boasting over 60 pages of informative content.
- We have actively encouraged more members to contribute records to Birdtrack and Swiftmapper, and there is clear evidence of several new SDOS members now contributing to the Sussex Ornithological Society records via Birdtrack.
- We have formalised our links with BTO and are now a registered partner.
- We successfully recruited a member to take on the management of our Garden Birdwatch Scheme from January 2022.
- We contributed articles to local magazines, the Brighton and Hove magazine BN1, and the Shoreham Herald.

### **Aim 2 - To promote the protection of birds and their environment, especially within the SDOS recording area**

- We persuaded the RSPB to install a small number of signs around the Adur Estuary reserve.
- We contributed financially to the provision of a nest box at Brooklands Park and repaired nest boxes in the churchyard of St Mary de Haura , New Shoreham, in the spring and autumn of 2021.
- In March 2021, nine new nest boxes installed were installed in the churchyard of St Nicolas, Old Shoreham- six of which were handmade by one of our members.
- In May 2021, ad hoc surveys commenced of Shepherd's Mead, Findon. This activity was important as it provided us with a legitimate channel for influencing the direction of re-wilding at the site.
- SDOS became full members of the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust sub - group, collaborating with organisations like the RSPB, Natural England, Sussex Wildlife Trust and others to find solutions to the growing problem of recreational disturbance on the Adur SSSI.
- Five awareness raising workshops were delivered for local paddlers (kayak and Stand Up Paddle Board instructors) reaching approximately 35 people , and resulting in some very positive social media coverage. The aim was to raise awareness of the fragility of the Adur Estuary SSSI and promote sensitive use of the river.

- In October 2021, and after two years of work, we finally got the ‘paddlers’ leaflet approved by RSPB. This leaflet promotes responsible paddling and explains why the SSSI is so important and how inadvertent damage can be avoided.
- During 2021, we developed formal links with Adur and Worthing Council in relation to New Salts Farm (NSF) and submitted a vision document in the autumn of that year, designed to put birds centre stage in the planning phase of this exciting project. We also formally registered our interest in the Pad Farm and Shepherds Mead re-wilding projects and have actively participated in stakeholder discussions.
- In 2021, we carried out a baseline survey of birds at NSF with weekly visits over ten weeks during spring and early summer, using a recognised survey methodology.
- We have contributed to World of Widewater and Friends of Shoreham Beach committee meetings and made a tentative link with Lancing Ring volunteers.
- In February 2022, we submitted a very detailed paper to Adur and Worthing District Council in relation to their public “call for green spaces” (a public consultation over green spaces for nature).

### **Aim 3 - To work with the local community to promote an interest in birds and their knowledge of local conservation issues**

- In March 2022, a digital archive of past reports and other SDOS publications was completed, with huge assistance from member Dr John Newnham. We are also digitally archiving a large number of historical newsletters and other written materials of interest and relevance to Shoreham and beyond.
- In September 2021, we delivered a birdwatching session to approximately 90 Primary School children, in conjunction with volunteers from World of Widewater. Very positive feedback was received from the school. In the same month a session for a U3A group from Brighton and Hove was delivered to great acclaim.
- Our Facebook group has been used to promote links with other nature focused groups such as Bramber Brooks Nature Reserve and Sussex Ornithological Society and to inform the wider general public of our conservation activities.
- In November 2021, SDOS contributed to an Adur and Worthing Council webinar, focusing on Sussex Bay and nature restoration and, in the same month, we were part of a COP26 twitter and YouTube video.
- In early December, we provided a tour of the Adur Estuary SSSI for members of the AWDC sustainability team. This was very well received and provided an opportunity for SDOS to raise awareness of how important the SSSI is and how and why it has deteriorated in recent years.
- We have refreshed our membership offer for children and young people and clarified our safeguarding stance for under 16s.

### **Aim 4 - To maintain systems and resources - for the efficient running of the society**

- Forty six people joined the AGM via Zoom on 23 March 21 - a very impressive turnout for our first ever virtual AGM. More than 70 people voted, mostly using the electronic voting facility- a first!
- In the light of feedback from our AGM, the website was significantly enhanced to explain the ‘SDOS recording area’, key birding sites and map references.
- Over the reporting period, we have attracted 54 new members, including five children.
- Our finances are healthy, and we have avoided raising our membership fees for at least another year.

### **Conclusions and thanks**

All of the above reflects hundreds of hours of volunteer time from Council colleagues and SDOS members and I thank you all. I must also give special mention and thanks to Val Bentley who has retired after 12 years at the helm of our garden birdwatch scheme. I also thank Sim Elliot for agreeing to take over the scheme.

I’m immensely proud of what has been achieved over the past year and I think that SDOS is reaching and influencing more people than ever before. Enthusing people about birding is what SDOS is all about - and I’m sure that we will continue to flourish and welcome new people to the society in years to come.

Tony Benton  
Chair - SDOS