



## Chair's report for the reporting period 14 March 2023 to 14 March 2024

### *Introduction*

During the period of time covered by this report, we celebrated our 70th anniversary, an important milestone in the history of the society. A great deal has changed in the world of ornithology over the past 70 years, both in terms of the changing fortunes of birds locally and how we go about studying them. Our publication **Rare Birds and Rare Events** celebrates 70 years of SDOS and provides an account of these changes. The book is a fascinating read, and reflects positively on the diligent recording of sightings by our members over many decades. It also serves to remind us how important it is that we log our bird sightings, preferably with the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Birdtrack scheme.

As you will see below, we have achieved a huge amount this year, all made possible by the hard work and dedication of members who volunteer their time and expertise. Without our volunteers, we would not be able to offer an extensive programme of walks and our very popular indoor meetings, and I thank you all.

It is also my pleasure to thank my Council colleagues for their incredible contributions over the past year. You all make a huge difference and the society is thriving because of your dedication, energy and enthusiasm.

The world doesn't stand still, and nor does the make up of Council. After more than 13 years of service, Peter Wyld is standing down as our IT coordinator. During that time Peter has revolutionised how we use IT to help run the business of the society, modernising our website, the user group, and the secure management of membership records. We are all greatly indebted to Peter.

The remainder of this report is structured around our four Aims for the year and illustrates, mostly in numbers, how successful we have been. I am very proud to present this Annual Report to our members.

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

#### **Our events programme - walks and talks**

We delivered a vibrant programme of **20** SDOS walks (including an innovative mini bus trip), and in addition **five** where we partnered with other organisations. Our **seven** indoor talks were very popular, and we have been successful in striking a balance between talks with a UK focus and talks on overseas destinations.

### **The study of birds - celebrating 70 years**

In November 2023, we published 'Rare Birds and Rare Events' as part of our 70th anniversary celebrations. This was a mammoth undertaking, with well over **200** hours of volunteer time devoted to editing this publication.

We also created **eight** commemorative videos, celebrating our 70th anniversary. Each video contained very personal reflections on being an SDOS member, and I'm very grateful for people's contributions and the time that they spent with our excellent in-house film maker.

### **Our newsletters**

We produced **two** excellent newsletters, and approximately half were delivered on line, so reducing printing and distribution costs. Our newsletters continue to be a valued benefit of membership of the society.

### **The user group**

Throughout the year the number of postings remained buoyant and this private group remains the principal way of sharing news on sightings. The data analysis (of species trends, abundance and so on) that also accompany some posts is extremely valuable and appreciated by many members.

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

### **Activities with a conservation focus**

We were very active on the conservation front, particularly but not exclusively in Shoreham. Over the year in question we:

- provided advice to Shoreham Beach Primary School in relation to their wildlife garden.
- repaired one nest box and installed a new one at St Nicolas church yard, Old Shoreham Road.
- provided a briefing session to two senior staff at Adur Activity Centre, followed by a bespoke education session for their instructors.
- made a presentation at Shoreham Port Sustainability Week, focusing on the River Adur SSSI, conservation issues, and the birds that can be seen there.
- were instrumental in supporting the installation of information panels beside the Adur SSSI. This reflected years of campaigning by SDOS members.
- submitted a detailed data report to the Adur Restoration Project, setting out the decline in wading birds using the SSSI and arguing for a better balance to be struck between recreation and conservation objectives.
- produced video for social media, promoting guidance on how to enjoy the River Adur without disturbing wildlife. This was particularly aimed at paddlers (Stand Up Paddle Boarders and Kayaks).
- completed **12** surveys at Cissbury Fields, with two SDOS colleagues also contributing to the site management plan and the sharing of data.
- wrote **three** articles for a local publication, Beach News, as well as speaking on BBC Radio Sussex.
- devoted over **350** hundred hours to conversations, advocacy, and advice to a range of organisations including Natural England, Environment Agency, RSPB and Adur and Worthing District Councils.
- created a code of conduct for Bird watchers and Photographers for the Adur Estuary.

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

#### **Outreach, education, awareness raising**

Working alongside WOW (World of Widewater) we welcomed **90** children from Seaside School to Widewater lagoon. The focus of the day was not on birds, but on engaging young children with nature, and they had an excellent time with the volunteers. Activities included pond dipping in the lagoon.

We launched **five** social media videos promoting an interest in birds and highlighting great places for urban birding within the SDOS recording area.

**Ten** Wetland Bird Surveys were carried out very publicly in Shoreham, resulting in excellent levels of engagement with people passing by the survey site beside the A259/Norfolk Bridge.

We supported an introduction to birdwatching youth event, hosted by Sussex Wildlife Trust.

Our use of social media continued to grow and we now have **102** followers on X (formerly known as Twitter), **123** followers on Instagram, **18** subscribers on YouTube (but 100s of views!), and over **1,400** subscribers to our Facebook Group. By using social media, we are able to extend our reach and influence to ever larger audiences.

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

During the year under report, we completed **6** risk assessments to cover our walks and talks programme.

At least **750 hours were donated** by Council members to ensure the smooth running of the society. This spans managing membership, finances, IT, documentation, the newsletters and 'back office' processes.

### ***Final thoughts***

Several times in recent months I've asked myself - what would our founding fathers make of SDOS at 70? I can only speculate, but hope that they would recognise that we are still carrying out our core mission to "*maintain and enhance our members' interest in birds and natural habitats, whatever their initial level of expertise*". They would also probably be amazed by our record membership numbers, dynamic walks and talks programme, vibrant user group, and our massive reach through our social media channels. And I hope that they would also feel immensely proud of what they started all those years ago.

Tony Benton  
Chair - SDOS

14 March 2024