

## **Chair's report for the reporting period 14 March 2024 - 17 March 2025**

### **Introduction**

SDOS (Shoreham District Ornithological Society) enjoyed another very successful year and it's my pleasure to present this performance report to our April 2025 AGM.

As you will see below, we have achieved a huge amount, 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.

During the year under review, Richard Nowak stepped down from his role as Field Outings Coordinator and was replaced by Tony Letchford. Richard had been in post since 2019 and we thank him for all of his hard work, both in that role and as a valued SDOS Council member.

The remainder of this report is structured around our four Aims for the year and illustrates, mostly in numbers, how successful we have been.

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

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

We delivered over 20 walks for members and a further four walks for external groups. We also pioneered minibus trips, including our first ever overnight (two day) minibus outing, to great acclaim. Eighty to 100 members have engaged with the walks programme.

#### **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. It has been encouraging to see some new members posting on the group.

#### **Membership**

In March 2025 we reached a membership milestone, when we exceeded 350 paid-up members of the society.

## **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:

- joined Sussex Nature Recovery Network
- submitted evidence to Natural England of wading bird declines in the Lower Adur Valley
- contributed to the development of a Habitat Management Plan for the Adur SSSI
- delivered practical conservation work at St Nicolas church, where we cleaned and repaired eight boxes and installed two additional boxes in the graveyard north of the church
- repaired eight boxes and installed a new box at St. Mary de Haura Church Yard
- submitted a formal response to the Adur Local Plan consultation
- had numerous meetings and discussions with staff and Councillors from Adur District Council, advocating for nature recovery and nature friendly policies
- conducted surveys at Cissbury Fields (12) and ad-hoc surveys at New Salts Farm and Pad Farm (all carried out by SDOS volunteers)
- objected to an inappropriate planning application at Goring Gap
- sponsored a barn owl box in memory of Dr Barrie Watson, a long standing member of SDOS

## **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**

We gave a presentation to the Shoreham Society that was very well received, focusing on the birds of the SSSI. Subsequent talks were given in Old Shoreham, Hangleton and Shoreham Beach (FoSB AGM).

We supported an event at Brooklands Lake and park, aimed at engaging young people. Over 50 checklists were handed out to children so that they could look for birds and 'tick' their sightings.

We supported the St Mary's de Haura eco-church event, rising awareness of local birds and promoting SDOS.

We hosted an event for the Adur River Recovery Project, where at least 60 people participated in SDOS guided walks throughout the day. We also created a pictorial checklist for the SSSI.

SDOS provided ornithological advice to two nature focused groups operating in Shoreham (World of Widewater and FoSB).

We wrote 15 articles for publication in neighbourhood magazines in Shoreham and Southwick.

We contributed our knowledge and expertise to an emerging conservation group in Old Shoreham and another Friends group focussing on the Adur SSSI.

### **Educating and inspiring people through social media**

Our use of social media continued to grow and we are active on X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube. We also have over **2,000** subscribers to our Facebook Group. By using social media, we are able to extend our reach and influence to ever larger audiences.

### **Repairing the SDOS bench**

Volunteers repaired the SDOS bench (beside the River Adur opposite the cement works). It's no mean feat getting tools and materials to this remote spot.

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

We carried out our first ever on-line survey, asking members for their views and experiences of the user group. About 130 members responded and we have made a number of minor changes to the User Group interface as a result. Overall, members were satisfied with the User Group.

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

We updated our User Group guidelines and created an internal decision tool, to assist with any scenarios where moderation of content might be required.

Our IT systems and processes were reviewed to ensure that they were GDPR compliant and secure.

We started a review of our website, to ensure that it is fit for purpose and meets the needs of our members.

At least **1,500 hours were donated** by Council members to ensure the smooth running of the society. This spans managing walks and talks, membership, finances, IT, documentation, the newsletters, conservation work and 'back office' processes.

## Final thoughts

Writing this report reminds me of just how much has been achieved and how we as a society have continued to evolve to meet the needs of our members. But we can't afford to be complacent and over the next 12 months, I envisage some significant challenges to fragile ecosystems within the SDOS recording area. With this in mind, the recording of birds (via Birdtrack wherever possible) has never been more important and it is only with solid data that we can oppose inappropriate developments that will be detrimental to wild birds. Future generations will thank us for stepping up, and we will continue to work constructively with statutory agencies and other relevant nature focused groups, to protect and enhance the natural world that gives us all so much pleasure in our daily lives.

On behalf of Council I must end by saying that we are immensely grateful to the support and encouragement that we receive from our members. Birding is an enjoyable and enriching hobby, and SDOS continues *"to maintain and enhance our members' interest in birds and natural habitats, whatever their initial level of expertise"*. We are the **friendly society!**

Tony Benton  
Chair - SDOS  
17 March 2025

