

ANNUAL REPORT - 2018

Amid so much negative news about the environment in general and wildlife in particular, I am delighted to be able to report another successful year for our Society. We seem to be able to continue to buck the national trend of decline for Societies such as ours as witnessed by our overall membership numbers and attendance at our official events. This level of activity was no doubt assisted by our wonderful summer the like of which we may not see again for a long time.

Our Indoor Meetings were all well attended with some exceeding our expectations for reasons which can be difficult to pinpoint. Not that this is a comment which would apply to the evening with Dr George McGavin on 23rd October which, by common consent, was a huge success. Every aspect of his TV persona came across in a Presentation full of insight and rib-tickling humour. Such was his reception from the Christchurch full house that, all being well, he intends to come back in 2019 and in 2020 for our 75th Anniversary Year. Otherwise the overall mix of topics for our Christchurch Meetings covered everything from Peat Bogs to Borneo and members responded well to this. We will continue to try to both educate and entertain even as it becomes increasingly clear that our wildlife needs all the help it can get and we will need to reflect this in our choice of Speakers.

Our involvement in local conservation initiatives continues at Ben Rhydding, Gallows Hill, Grass Wood, Otley Wetlands and Sun Lane and we have every right to feel proud of the work we have contributed to at these sites over many years. In addition we continue to support other nature conservation initiatives in and around Wharfedale by providing funding where appropriate and I can assure you this support is much appreciated by the numerous recipients over the years.

There are of course a variety of other activities we offer our members, all made possible by the efforts of numerous volunteers. These include Microscope Evenings, Coach Outings, Botany and Bird Outings, a Fungus Foray, Summer Visits and Tuesday Evening Nature Walks. My warmest thanks to all those whose efforts make these activities happen especially Helen Steward who continues to organise our Summer Programme so effectively.

As usual I need to thank all our Committee Members for their support and for 'keeping the show on the road'. Gordon Haycock's humorous emails advertising our events are now part of our staple fare not to mention his support to Committee as Secretary. Ian Watt completed seven years as Treasurer doing a faultless job and went on to help us through a difficult period whilst we found a replacement – we eventually welcomed Jeff Davitt into this role. Jenny Watson has embraced the Data Controller role with efficiency and enthusiasm whilst Ros Lilley continues to make a sterling contribution as Membership Secretary. Tim Howson continues to broadcast our activities very effectively through his management of our website. A special mention must also be made of Karen Shackleton for all her support – in addition her work in highlighting the problems of pollution from the Ben Rhydding Sewage Works has been exemplary. Our Publications Officer, John Stidworthy, produced a superb updated recruitment leaflet which we can use at any public events to help us fulfil our essential need to get new members onboard.

Our Recorders are, of course, one of our great strengths and they have delivered yet again with their reports for this Review. We were sorry to lose our Bird Recorder, Richard Fuller, when he moved out of the area but we are very grateful to both Catherine Burton and Andrew Kelly who have stepped in to fulfil this role between them.

One of the things we must do as a Society is keep up to date and concentrate our activities in those areas that are most attractive for our members and, of course, for our threatened wildlife. We will continue to keep all our activities under review and not hesitate to discard those that are no longer delivering for us in any meaningful way.

On a final note I cannot finalise this Foreword without further reference to our beleaguered wildlife both in this country and throughout the world. It is becoming increasingly clear that the forecast Anthropocene – the sixth great extinction – is now happening all around us not least amongst the basis for everything else, namely insects. The main culprits are clear, namely agricultural intensification, climate change and over-population. It is incumbent upon us therefore, as a natural history society, to bear witness to this potentially cataclysmic trend and to try to make a contribution, however small, to both broadcasting these trends and mitigating their effects wherever possible at a local level. You can rest assured that we will not lose sight of these vital obligations.

We yet again held our membership fees at a very modest level simply because we saw no need to recommend an increase. We would rather gather the money we need to run all our activities by charging a small amount for a consequently larger number of members than a larger amount for what would inevitably then be a smaller number of members. In terms of our membership and the attendances at our Indoor Meetings, we must be one of the best supported, wholly voluntary, natural history organisations in the country and I would like to keep it that way!

This Review is a splendid reflection of our 2018 year and we are indebted to all those who have contributed to its production, especially of course John Stidworthy, the Editor, who has done such a professional job of pulling it all together.