



Chairman's Report 2020 / 2021

It is my pleasure to present my fifth annual report to you. This report will be tabled at our AGM in April as part of our regular monthly meeting. Whilst I would have dearly hoped that I could have delivered the paper in person, standing in front of you, sadly this is still not possible and our AGM will have to follow the familiar virtual format on Zoom.

Despite the restrictions brought about by the Covid pandemic as Branch Chairman I am pleased that we continue to provide a great programme of meetings for our members. However, it has been disappointing that we have not been able to run our birding outings. Your Branch Committee, together with volunteers and long-standing supporters, have worked hard to provide a range of discussions, talks and bulletins throughout the year.

The restrictions over the past year have meant that we could not meet in person but it has been great to see familiar faces at our Zoom meetings. In fact on a number of occasions our attendance at our virtual meetings has exceeded our attendance at either our Edinburgh or Aberlady venues, and on one occasion exceeded the threshold on the SOC Zoom licence, meaning that not everybody could participate. Fortunately our talks are, in the most part, recorded for later viewing.

As we have not been able to meet up and have had to contend with birding our local patches we ran a couple of competitions through the year, both expertly organised by Anne Hyatt. We ran both a photography and a "local patch" competition. Please see our recent Lothian Bird E-Bulletins for more details.

Whilst the focus is on birding, and bird watching, there is also a social element in bringing like-minded people together. The Branch runs on volunteers from our County Recorder, Stephen Welch; to Mark Holling who co-ordinates the Wednesday discussion group; to the Committee who help plan and run our indoor (and outdoor) programme for members.

This past winter has also seen volunteers embark on recording birds for the East Lothian Winter Atlas, co-ordinated by Ian Andrews and Mark Holling. Despite a good uptake of volunteers covering 212 tetrads covering East Lothian restrictions on movements have meant that not all of the records could be collected and a further count may have to be conducted next winter.

As the SOC is your organisation if you have any comments to make, or wish to see any changes to our programme then please do let either myself or another Committee member know.

I would like to thank the Branch Committee for their steadfast support over the past year. There is a lot of behind the scenes work that goes into making our programme successful. Alison Creamer has done more than her fair share of the work this last year as Branch Secretary and she will be sadly missed when she steps down from her role, and the Committee, at this year's AGM.

Thankfully David Parmee has agreed to take over this job. Members will be familiar with David as he hosts our regular monthly meetings. Thank you David for volunteering so readily.

I must also thank Mike Thornton for organising some of our excellent programme of speakers, in addition to those organised by Kathryn Cox at SOC HQ, and to Stephen Hunter, our Treasurer, who once again balanced our books. This year we have not had to call on Stephen to provide technical support for our audio-visual equipment.

Gill Parmee agreed to organise a birding holiday for Branch members to Speyside, which has been postponed until further notice. Thanks also go to Committee members Gillian Herbert and Hilary Maxfield for their support. Anne Hyatt has already received a mention, and she is also standing down from our Committee as she takes on a new role with the local branch of the RSPB.

This means that we do have a couple of vacancies on the Committee and so if you would like to lend a hand you would be most welcome to join us.

I would also like to thank the excellent array of speakers who gave up their time to speak to us at our indoor meetings. Since the commencement of our winter indoor meeting programmes we have enjoyed the following talks:

September (Dan Brown - Curlew conservation);
October (Chris Bailey – advising landowners on waders, Corn Crake, Capercaillie and Corn Bunting);
November (John Calladine – Short-eared Owls);
December (Stan da Prato – local warblers and other migrants);
January (John Harrison – Aberlady Local Nature Reserve);
February (Jeremy Greenwood – on the pioneer woman photographer, Emma Turner); and
March (Ally Lemon – Corn Buntings);

Thank you to all of our members for contributing throughout the year, either in your participation at events or for volunteering.

We should also remember those no longer with us. I learnt of the sad passing of former Lothian branch chair, Willie Prest, in early March. He will be missed.

Richard Leslie

April 2021