



Little egret. Egleton. Photo by C. Baxter.

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**Dear Members,**

The coronavirus pandemic is evolving rapidly, and things are changing daily, so much so that it is difficult to keep up with developments. You will all be aware of all the new restrictions and I'm sure you don't need me to remind you of them. They are having a huge impact on everything, including our RNHS activities. We have decided to cancel all our meetings until the end of July. This is of course very disappointing and for the present at least, we cannot go out and enjoy the countryside; the spring flowers and birdsong which lift our spirits at this time of year. But don't be downhearted! We have thought of a way to make the disappointment into a great opportunity! **We are inviting all our members, wherever you live, to enter the GREAT RNHS Garden Wildlife Challenge.** You can keep a note of all species that visit, reside in, or fly over your garden between 1st April and the end of June. Look under stones, peer in the leaf litter, look in your pond and record everything and the date on which you saw it – perhaps keep a little notebook by the kitchen window or door. The at the end of June put them all down on paper or email to myself or Peter Scott. The person with the largest species list will be the winner and I'm sure we'll find a suitable prize in July – or when we are able to resume our normal meetings.

We realise that many of you will find this period of enforced inactivity frustrating and depressing, so we would like to be able to contact you all by email, to keep you in touch with what's happening. If you do have an email address and have not given it to us, we would be pleased to receive it. You only need to email one of the addresses listed in this edition of FF, and we will be able to take your address from that. We are considering other ways of staying in touch, but in the meantime

if you need to hear a friendly voice, or any other help that we can give, then there are phone numbers also listed in FF and we shall do our best! Please note that all April Fieldfare's will be delivered by post unless you receive it by email. This is an obvious precaution for the time being.

On a much lighter note, I would like to share with you a couple of thoughts from the beginning of the new year. On our way home from the AGM and Lloyd Park's excellent talk we were treated to a lovely moment – one of those that stays in your mind for a long time afterwards. As we approached one of the roundabouts on the Oakham by-pass a fox crossed in front of us and stopped on the verge at the side within a couple of feet. He (or she) was lit up by a passing car and stood and regarded us for a long moment, whiskers and lashes clearly visible, and at the same time a barn owl flew towards us above his head along the verge. If only I'd had a camera handy! Barn owls have been struggling to feed in the windy and wet weather this winter, and they are hungry, so have been hunting in daylight in several areas.

The spring has been a little slow this year, dull and damp doesn't cheer us up much, but the last week has begun to improve and at last the days are drawing out. Chiff-chaffs are singing well, and the Ospreys are back at RW. There was much excitement as a young female tried to take over the resident female's nest, but she was given short shrift by Maya on her return! Violets have been beautiful and primroses brighten grassy banks- even the odd wood anemone has begun to flower. Nature continues to reflect the seasons, in spite of the way we mistreat her, and gives us pleasure in spite of the difficulties we face.

**Keep well and take care of yourselves!**

**Don't forget to list as many species in your garden as you can. ( If you can't identify anything and can send a photo then recorders or committee may be willing to help!)**

*Linda Biddle, RNHS Chair*

## A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

If you have already had a browse through this month's magazine, you will have noticed that we have not included the usual recorders notes for the past three months. Please bear with us; the records will be included in the July Fieldfare along with the results of the "Great RNHS Garden Wildlife challenge". (See Linda's Intro).

Due to the unusual circumstances that we all find ourselves in now, the content of this issue is limited but we hope you will still enjoy the read.

*Carolyn and Sophie.*

## CANCELLED MEETINGS UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

### INDOOR MEETINGS

**Tuesday 7th April 7.30pm** Meadows by Jo Costley of Plantlife.

### OUTDOOR MEETINGS AND WALKS

**Sunday 19th April.** Migrant Birds of Tunnely wood.

**Saturday 2nd May.** Dawn chorus.

**Saturday 16th May.** Hampton nature reserve.

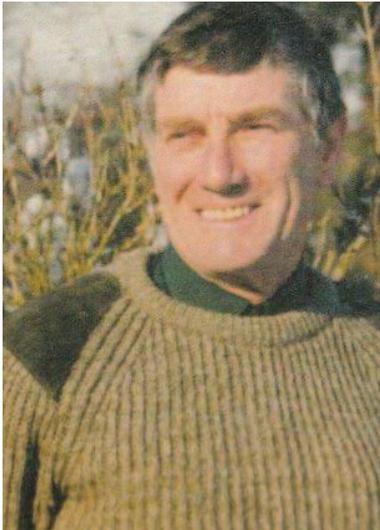
**Saturday 20th June.** Wildflower walk. Merry's meadows.

**Saturday 4th July.** Flora of Cossington meadows.

**Saturday 25th July.** Family bug hunt. Ketton Quarry.

## A TRIBUTE

John Stapleton. Photo by Phil Rudkin.



### JOHN ROBERT STAPLETON. Founder Member RNHS.

**Died: 6th February 2020, aged 89**

Rutland Natural History Society was formed in 1965 in Oakham. Among the audience at that first meeting were two people from Stamford - John Stapleton and his then wife Jill. When the first secretary, Roy Hunter moved away from Oakham, John and Jill were elected to take over as joint secretaries and served for many years.

John was an experienced wildlife photographer and sound-recordist, studying Nuthatches' habits and their ecology. He was also an excellent organiser and leader of the society's Show stands at various events in Rutland, his photographs gracing several of the boards.

One of the most important achievements by the society was a 6-year survey: "Before Rutland Water", carried out from 1971 to 1976. John and Jill Stapleton were the leaders, and they spent months and countless hours visiting farmers and landowners, getting permission for entry on to their land. John then had field maps drawn up, printed and copied for members involved in the survey. (I still have my copies up in the loft).

Finally, in February 1981, John set-up the "Hambleton Woods and Cheaney Spinney Nest Box" project, which became very successful for many years.

When David Needham and I presented our lecture: "Celebrating 50 years of the RNHS" at VAR Oakham, on Tuesday 7th April 2015, John and his wife Veronica attended the event. Fortunately, there were a few of us older members who remembered John, and a cluster surrounded both him and Veronica over tea, coffee and biscuits.

As part of the 50 years celebrations, the society put on a special event with guest speaker Mike Dilger (from the BBC 'One Show'), on Friday evening 8th May 2015 at the 'Wilson Auditorium' Oakham School. Although suffering from painful arthritis and using a walking stick, John and Veronica negotiated the stairs and joined the packed audience for the lecture and celebrations.

John Stapleton was an Honorary Life Member of Rutland Natural History Society and still received the 'Fieldfare'. He always enjoyed the contents and was proud of the Society's progress!

**Phil Rudkin. 20 March 2020**

## REPORTS ON RNHS FIELD TRIPS

### January 2020

Fort Henry. Photo by Linda Biddle.



### A WINTER WALK



Our yearly New Year January walk, led by Linda and Anthony Biddle, took on it's usual blustery, cold, damp, drizzly flavour but of course - it didn't put us off. 15 cold-blooded members of RNHS bravely negotiated the slippery stiles, muddy tracks and biting wind to take note of the wildfowl and any other meagre signs of life that dared to join us in the walk around Exton Park. The best walk of the year so far!



It was a cold and blustery February morning. Grey skies and heavy showers en route did not promise well for the morning activity. Undeterred, and well wrapped up against the wind, a group of 22 members and friends assembled in the farmyard of VHF, where we were met and taken to a meeting room by the farmer, Nicholas Watt.

After giving us a drink, we then listened to a talk about the history of the farm and how he came to set up the thriving bird-food business, turning his farm into a haven for birds and other wildlife while still maintaining a successful farming business. Declining bird counts on his farm and surrounding areas in the early 1990s, led him to try a more sympathetic approach to farming and his success at the increasing numbers of birds such as linnets and whitethroats encouraged him to continue, together with the sales of birdseed grown on the farm, part of which is now run organically. 3 large wind turbines dominate the flat fenland farm while the roof of the farm buildings are covered with solar panels, producing electricity aplenty!

Outside we were shown the double hedgerows, (now trimmed every 4th year) and between them were sown wildflower seed mixes. Many tree sparrow nest-boxes had been erected, and we saw the first of the farmland birds such as reed buntings and chaffinch. Out on the farmland were several hares, along with flocks of linnet, tree-sparrows and reed buntings, while yellowhammers flitted between the hawthorns of another double hedgerow. Skylarks could be heard singing above our heads and teasel heads, remaining from last summer, provided food for the birds. Since N.W. had persuaded the local water board to mow the banks on one side only per year, leaving the other side unmown, the reeds along the ditches gave cover for the voles and mice, leaving them undetected by predators such as heron, egret and cormorant. Similarly, in a dry year, (unlike this one) the water levels in the dykes are allowed to remain high, giving cover for fish and aquatic invertebrates. This year though, the water levels have been dropped for protection against flooding, so the fish and aquatic creatures are at the mercy of predators.

We had a good view of a barn owl sheltering in bushes in the lee of a copse until he/she flew away along the bank. N.W. remarked that owls are struggling to find prey at the moment, because the strong winds mean they are unable to hear their prey or fly sufficiently stealthily to hunt easily. As we drove along a dyke, a pair of goosander took off, over and around our heads and several cormorant and mallard were also seen here. At a larger area of water, numerous wigeon, mallard and shoveller paddled or sheltered from the wind, while a few greylag geese waddled about on the shoreline. NW took us to look at an area of oilseed radish. Direct drilled after a crop of winter wheat, it is a cover crop, preventing weed growth during the autumn and winter, also providing extra nitrogen when it is desiccated in the spring, when cereal is direct drilled into the seedbed. The process means there is no need to cultivate the soil, allowing invertebrates to thrive, which in turn gives food for birds. NW said that last month there were over a thousand birds on the area, and last year, after the oilseed radish, 45pairs of lapwing had nested on the field! At least one farmer has the interests of wildlife at heart!



Vine house farm visit. Photos by Linda Biddle.



On a chilly and grey but fine Saturday morning 15 members and our leader Lloyd Park assembled at the birdwatching centre at Eggleton. Lloyd had already set the scene for us on the previous Tuesday evening when he had spoken to us about bird ringing, so we were keen to see some of the species he had mentioned.

We set off along the track towards Redshank Hide where good clear views of wigeon, teal, great white egret, and further out, shoveler and gadwall were obtained. Members were engrossed listening to Lloyd's expert descriptions and distinguishing features of the wildfowl out on the water.

After a while we walked beside the edges of the trees and bushes towards Osprey hide, catching the sight and sounds of the many birds flitting amongst the lower branches; chiff-chaff – the first of many migrants this season – a robin, piping his song in the hawthorn bushes. We were also delighted to see that the other little birds flitting over our heads were tiny goldcrests, many of us observing the identifying crest and brightly coloured patches on its head. Approaching Osprey Hide, a Cetti's warbler gave a burst of its insistent staccato song.

Once in the hide we lingered again, watching a similar range of duck species, with great crested grebes, as well as striking close up views of shoveler. In the distance were a couple of goldeneye.

When we finally moved on to Shoveler hide, where the light was better, we were joined by another birding expert, Lloyds's father, Chris Park. Here, we were treated to lovely views of rafts of shoveler, (over 60 counted), with goldeneye bobbing up and down feeding below the surface of the water and then, in the distance a group of smew gave us added excitement. The smart black and white plumage of the males, and more subtle colouring of the females brought the morning to a very satisfying conclusion – and we didn't even get cold!

Returning back to the centre, the chiff-chaffs were again calling repeatedly, promising more spring migrants to come, and a real sign that spring is bursting out around us.

Thanks were given to Lloyd, our expert leader, who suggested that we might perhaps have an extra meeting in September, when he would be able to demonstrate some bird ringing to us. We are already looking forward to this!



Eggleton. Photos by C. Baxter

# RUTLAND NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

## Income and Expenditure Account for year ended 31/12/19

2018		2019
<b>Income</b>		
2,679	Subscriptions for Year	2,424
504	Gift Aid tax refund	450
138	Donations	93
0	Family Day	39
310	Calendar sales	334
73	Interest Received	74
<b>3,704</b>	<b>Total Income</b>	<b>3,414</b>

<b>Expenditure</b>		
552	Hall hire & refreshments	591
255	Speakers & visit leaders	280
733	Fieldfare printing	701
120	Annual report printing	0
36	Membership cards	0
432	Publications Distribution	369
67	Insurance	90
22	Postage, sundries etc	105
40	L&RWT membership	40
140	Rutland Show	0
0	Family Day	92
144	Website	154
272	Calendars production	376
0	Donations	500
<b>2,813</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>3,298</b>
<b>891</b>	<b>Surplus/Deficit</b>	<b>116</b>

<b>Reserves</b>		
7,635	Balance brought forward	8,526
891	Surplus for year	116
<b>8,526</b>	<b>Balance carried forward</b>	<b>8,642</b>

(includes £2000 Insurance Reserve)

Reserves include £410 (£420 - 2018) from legacy received to be utilised for ornithological lectures over time

5,427	Melton Mowbray Building Society	5,501
3,805	Lloyds Bank current account	3,585
19	Petty Cash	91
-815	Less Subs received in advance	-625
90	Insurance paid in advance	90
<b>8,526</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>8,642</b>

The above accounts are in accordance with the records produced to me



Margaret Conner  
27/1/2020 Date



Douglas Matthew CA  
6/2/20 Date

## AGM FOR THE YEAR 2019/2020



Phil Rudkin presenting Gill Chiverton Flowers at AGM. Photo by Linda Biddle.

### Held at Voluntary Action Rutland March 3rd 2020.

This years AGM was very well attended with approximately 65 members making up the audience.

Linda Biddle (chairperson) reported that all meetings, both indoor and outdoor had been well attended this year. A new venture for the Society was a Family Bug Hunt, held at a Ketton Quarry in July. This was particularly successful, and Linda thanked all those who organized and helped throughout the year.

Peter Scott, Vice Chairman, was also thanked for his huge contribution in managing the website which is fast becoming a very important means of communication with members.

Hendrina Ellis was thanked for editing Fieldfare over the past 12 years. Carolyn Baxter and her daughter, Sophie Widdowson, have now taken over that task after Richard and Linda Brown stepped into the breach and edited 2 editions for which they were also thanked.

At the 2018/2019 AGM, three new committee members were elected. John Rogers who is our Botany recorder, Jayne Walker, now our programme Secretary and Linda Clark now our Secretary.

Risk assessment and Safeguarding policies and procedures have been revised and updated by the committee. John Bristow and Linda Clark have been appointed as Safeguarding officers.

All our Recorders were thanked for their work in maintaining Rutland records and an appeal was made to all members to send in records.

Margaret Conner treasurer and Membership Secretary gave a concise report on the Accounts. The Society has an overall cash balance of £8,642. Suggestions as to how we could best spend some of this money to further the aims of the Society were invited from the members.

All existing committee members were re-elected en bloc with three new committee members, Patricia Marston, Jill and Jeffrey Wilcox-Smith proposed, seconded and elected.

Cliff Bacon talked about the situation at Clipsham Park Woods and invited members to write to the council about the proposed extension of the Quarry.

Linda Biddle alerted the members to projects that were scheduled for this coming year. A Water Shrew Survey, a Curlew Survey and a Botany Survey. Volunteers to partake in any of these surveys were welcome and invited to contact a committee member.

The AGM was closed by Phil Rudkin Vice President. An excellent talk about bird ringing and Migration and the information obtained from this work was given by Lloyd Park of Rutland Water.

**Linda Clark. Secretary.**

### FREE TO GOOD HOME!

#### Archived Fieldfare and Annual report magazines.

If anyone would like a copy of a specific year to add to their collection, or even multiple copies of these lovely magazines, please contact Linda Clark (see back cover contacts) and she will sort through them for you.

**THIS IS A LIMITED TIME OFFER ONLY** so now that we are all severely confined to our own homes, this may be is a great opportunity for you to follow through the many years of wildlife recording in Rutland.

## NEW BUTTERFLY RECORDERS

We would like to thank Richard Brown for his contribution to the Rutland butterfly recording over the past few years. The baton has now been passed on to two new butterfly recorders – Martin Quinlan and Tricia Marston. We welcome you both and hope for a few new surprises over the next few years. Contact details below.



Red necked grebe, Lyndon. Photo by P. Scott

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