

Sussex Ornithological Society Strategy 2024-2025

Our Strategy sets out the work the Society does to achieve our objectives and to provide Society members with a good understanding of our activities.

The Strategy guides the work of SOS Council, and our Scientific and Membership & Publicity Committees. It is reviewed annually by Council.

The Objects of the SOS are:

- To record and study wild birds in the county of Sussex.
- To assist in the conservation of the wild birds of Great Britain.
- To engage, inspire and educate people to enjoy, appreciate and understand birds and their habitats.

To further these objects, we will:

Record and study wild birds in Sussex

Be the official recorder of birds in Sussex. Maintain a computerised database of Sussex bird records.

Continually encourage members and non-members to submit records and educate them to make their records more informative. Keep under review the methodology for collecting and storing records.

Support nationally organised bird surveys and carry out targeted recording or Sussex-only surveys if there is felt to be a specific gap in our records.

Publish annually the Sussex Bird Report and periodically (about every 20 years) an atlas/avifauna of Sussex birds showing changes in species distribution and abundance.

Review and adjudicate on records of rare and difficult-to-identify species and refer records for nominated species to BBRC for adjudication.

Assist in the conservation of the wild birds of Great Britain

Share our records (with exceptions for very sensitive species) with the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre, who are often the first “port of call” for developers requesting records, and other bodies as appropriate, so that our records are used to help conserve birds. Fulfil requests for data from such bodies as RBBP (Rare Breeding Birds Panel), BTO and RSPB, and other appropriate bodies/persons.

Support appeals for funds from other bodies for projects promoting the interests of birds in Sussex, following the principles set out in the Financial Strategy.

Initiate projects of benefit to wild birds.

Continue management of Charleston Reedbed for conservation purposes when necessary and appropriate.

Continue to be represented on other bodies in Sussex where decisions will affect birds.

Engage, inspire, and educate people to enjoy, appreciate and understand birds and their habitats

Organise an annual conference covering themes related to wildlife, particularly birds, which help to achieve the Society's objects.

Organise an annual programme of outings covering the main birdwatching sites in and around Sussex.

Encourage scientific study of birds through the publication of papers in the Sussex Bird Report and by providing financial support for ornithological research.

Publish a quarterly newsletter to keep members informed of the Society's work and to inspire them to help in survey work and other activities. Encourage members to submit interesting articles for publication on county bird-related subjects.

Develop and maintain a website and social media for communicating with members and others.

Support specific campaigns to educate and involve the public on wildlife (mainly avian) issues.

Our Resources

We will continue to make best use of our resources (money and people, all of whom are volunteers), and we will:

Continue efficient financial administration of the Society and implement our Financial Strategy, and Reserves Policy (See Annex below).

Regularly review the format of the AGM.

Regularly review the Committee structure of the Society, to make sure that it fulfils the requirements set out above. We will maintain Roles and Responsibilities for each Committee, and update Officers' job descriptions.

Each specialist function within the SOS is set out in written form and is reviewed annually.

Maintain and grow our membership so that the Society can effectively carry out its objects.

Develop links with other natural history clubs and societies in Sussex to our mutual benefit.

Financial Strategy

The Society will use its funds in support of its objectives. It will seek to retain adequate reserves to enable it to give support to projects and appeals as they arise and will raise additional funds to replenish reserves or to support specific projects if necessary.

Financial Reserves Policy

Council has established a Reserves Policy whereby the unrestricted funds not committed or invested for the long term should be at least six months of resources expended. At this level Council feels it would be able to continue the current activities of the Society in the event of a significant drop in funding. Council will review the actual reserves level annually and limit commitments so that this level is maintained.

SOS Council – Role and Responsibilities

Role

To ensure that the Society's Objects are achieved, with a regularly updated strategy which sets out how this will be done. To regularly monitor risks to the Society's ability to function, and management of the Society's finances. To review the work of the Society's Scientific and Membership & Publicity Committees, to assign specific tasks to them and to minimise overlaps with each committee. To seek to ensure that those appointed as Officers, or members of Society committees, deliver their allotted tasks and can contribute positively in their roles.

Responsibilities

To ensure that the Society's Objects and Rules are adhered to, and that the Society's governance is of the highest standard, including regularly monitoring risk.

To prepare and update annually a strategy for the Society, that delivers the Society's Objects and ensures that the Society's charitable status is maintained.

To review the Society's Finances, approve all expenditures and ensure that income is appropriate to expenditure.

To ensure that an Annual Report is produced for the membership and the Charities Commission and that the Annual General Meeting is organised.

To approve nominations of Honorary Officers in sensitive positions before their names go forward to the AGM (per Rule 26).

To appoint, annually, a Chair of Council.

To approve, at each May Council Meeting, the membership of the Scientific Committee, M&P Committee, and the SOS Records Committee (SOSRC).

To review the work of the Scientific and M&P Committees, assign specific tasks to them and to minimise overlaps between committees and Council.

To act as the final arbiter of disputes within Committees.

To seek to ensure that those appointed to Council, or as members of Committees, can contribute positively in their roles. To help achieve this, to identify skills/experience gaps that it is desirable to have filled.

To implement and review annually appropriate Health and Safety measures covering the Society's activities, particularly outings.

To seek to ensure that the Society is always held in high esteem.

To meet annually with representatives of national and local bodies having ornithological interests, to discuss on a confidential basis their intentions regarding investment in existing or new reserves in Sussex.

Council membership

The Council will consist of up to 8 members and those Officers described in Rules 9a and 10 of the Society's Rules.

SOS Scientific Committee – Role and Responsibilities

Role

To oversee and advise Council on the scientific and technical work of the Society such as surveys, record keeping, management of the database, rare bird verification, ornithological publications, and conservation work. Ensure that the subsequent results are to the highest scientific standards and accepted by all relevant external bodies and other ornithologists.

Responsibilities

To identify ways in which conservation of birds in Sussex can be practically improved and to promote appropriate initiatives.

To review and support the work of the Society's Conservation Officers.

To review the work of SOSRC and to ensure it is carried out in a timely fashion and to the highest standards.

To review the work of the Society's Database Manager, ensuring that the Society's records are held securely, processed promptly, are well backed up, and that our system can meet present and future needs.

To oversee the content of the Sussex Bird Report, including scientific papers, and ensure that the report is produced on time and to the highest standards possible.

To ensure that the content of “one-off” SOS ornithological publications, such as Avifaunas and Checklists, are of the highest standard possible.

To make sure that requests for records from such bodies as RBBP (Rare Breeding Birds Panel), British Birds (Scarce Migrants Report), BTO and RSPB are met punctually and comprehensively.

To support nationally organised bird surveys (such as BTO and RSPB surveys).

To identify gaps in the comprehensiveness of species records in Sussex and organise for such gaps to be addressed where this is felt to be necessary, through targeted recording or Sussex-only surveys.

Regularly review and update the guidelines for sharing data on sensitive species.

To review the work of the Archivist each June ahead of the Archivist presenting a yearly report to Council in July.

To receive reports (at least annually) from those SOS members who represent the SOS on external committees and to take appropriate action.

To report to Council on the above responsibilities at each Council meeting.

Scientific Committee membership

Chair of Scientific Committee*, Projects & Surveys Officer, Bird Report Editor, Conservation Officer, Recorder, Database Manager, the BTO Sussex Area representative, the Bird Report scientific papers editor and such other members which the Committee feels will aid its work (*the Chair is also a Council member).

Each year, at the meeting following the Society’s AGM, the Scientific Committee shall elect one of its members to serve as its Chair. This person can be re-elected as Chair in subsequent years.

Council shall ratify the full membership of the Scientific Committee and SOSRC each year at its May meeting.

SOS Membership and Publicity Committee – Role and Responsibilities

Role

To ensure that the Society’s members value the Society and the benefits their membership gives them. To communicate with members and the wider public to advertise and advance the work of the Society through a range of channels including the website, newsletter and other means. To recruit new members actively. Council shall ratify the full membership of the M&P committee each year at their May meeting.

Responsibilities

Website

To ensure that the website is properly managed, up to date, that its content reflects the objects of the Society, and is attractive to both members and potential members.

Newsletter

To ensure that the Newsletter provides members with an engaging and informative read. To give guidance on content and, if necessary, help the Newsletter Editor acquire new articles and photographs.

Press & Publicity

To ensure that the profile of the Society and the general public's awareness of it and of bird-related issues in Sussex are promoted to the best advantage via traditional media, and through maintaining an active and engaging social media presence on appropriate platforms.

Outings and Society meetings

To ensure that a comprehensive programme of outings is organised each year. To organise the Annual Conference. The Committee supports the Conference Organiser in ensuring that arrangements are in place and an engaging selection of speakers are invited.

To organise other events for members when requested (including the President's Event), except the AGM which is the duty of Council.

January Bird Race

The paperwork and publicity for this event to be organized under this committee.

Society Awards

The paperwork and publicity for Society awards to be organised under this committee, including setting up an Awards Committee (made up of President, Chair of Council, and one member each from Council, Scientific and M&P) to decide who should receive awards.

Society Membership

To ensure that membership numbers are reported at each meeting, that membership renewals are promptly chased, and that reasons for members leaving are determined, analysed and, if necessary, acted upon.

To use appropriate methods to attract new members including initiating membership recruitment campaigns from time to time.

M&P Committee Membership

Chair of M&P Committee (a Council position), Newsletter Editor, Press & Publicity Officer, Webmaster, Outings Organiser, Membership Officer and Conference Organiser, and such other members which the Committee feels will aid its work.

The Chair is to be appointed annually. A designated Secretary for this Committee is not required.

Date of last review - September 2024