



Annual Report & Accounts

**Year Ending
31 December 2023**

Annual General Meeting

Saturday 23rd March 2024

**In the Devon Suite at the Exeter Court Hotel, Kennford, Exeter EX6 7UX at
3.00pm**

Agenda

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the 2023 Annual General Meeting
3. Matters arising from the Minutes
4. Chairman's Report
5. Secretary's Report
6. Treasurer's Report
7. Election of Officers:

		Proposed	Seconded
Chairman	Vacancy		
Treasurer	Vacancy		
Secretary	M Daniels	G Burton	C Randall
Mid Devon Branch Rep	T Misselbrook	N Armstrong	T Utting

8. Election of Auditor/Independent Examiner – Thomas Westcott

There will be a break for tea/coffee followed by a talk by Kevin Cox titled 'Swifts in Devon'

Devon Birds

The Society is registered with the Charity Commission of England and Wales (no 1191647) and is governed by its Constitution. The address of the Hon. Secretary is 16 Erme Drive, Ivybridge, Devon PL21 9BN.

Names marked with * denote charity Trustees during the year.

Vacant	President
Mr R G Burton*	Chairman
Mr C Randall *	Vice Chairman
Mr M T Daniels *	Secretary
Mr S Churchley *	Treasurer
Vacant	County Recorder
Mr T Utting *	Promotions & Engagement Secretary
Vacant	Publishing Group Representative
Mr C Randall *	East Devon Branch Representative
Mr N D'Agorne*	South Devon Branch Representative
Mr R Turner	Taw & Torridge Branch Rep
Mrs L Harris *	Plymouth Branch Representative
Mr T Misselbrook	Mid Devon Branch Representative (from Nov 2023)
Mr N Armstrong*	Mid Devon Branch Representative (to Nov 2023)
Ms F Freshney *	Ordinary Member
Mr A Colston *	Ordinary Member (resigned Oct 2023)
Mrs R Syms*	Youth Development Officer (resigned October 2023)

Bankers. CAF (Charities Aid Foundation), 25 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent ME19 4TA

Independent Examiner. Thomas Westcott, 47 Boutport Street, Barnstaple, Devon EX31 1SQ

The objects of the Society are contained in its Constitution, which is published and a copy available to all Members via the website.

A review of activities and achievements during the year is contained in the Society's Officers' Reports.

Devon Birds

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Tuesday 18th April 2023 at the Exeter Court Hotel at 7pm.

The Chairman welcomed the 27 people present.

1. **Apologies.** Apologies had been received from 5 people.
2. **Minutes of the 2022 Annual General Meeting.** The Minutes were accepted as a true record. Proposed by: R Turner, Seconded by: G Easton. Unanimously approved.
3. **Matters Arising from the Minutes.** There were no matters arising.
4. **Chairman's Report.** The Chairman reported on recent progress and goals going forward. He reported on the new website and enhanced policies and procedures. For the future there is the ongoing Devon Birds Strategy, which includes: Habitat Protection, Sentinel Species, Partnerships, Monitoring and Education. All will help to develop a more concerted approach to protect and enhance Devon's birdlife. Assisted by developing partnerships and sustainable conservation.
G Burton provided more information about Habitat Protection. The plan is to help to create an inclusive and effective environment for supporting bird conservation and protection. He noted that there are big differences between Devon Birds and the RSPB and Devon Wildlife Trust. Devon Birds is solely run by volunteers whereas the other two organisations are fully staffed. G Burton continued to say that it was planned to work with the better resourced/ professional conservation agencies. Collaborate with them on issues affecting loss of habitat, persecution, and landscape scale restoration projects. Also, to respond to potentially damaging planning matters by assessing the effect on key bird populations and working in close cooperation with partners by supplying critical bird data. For planning issues that do not meet a threshold of significance, individual members will be supported with central bird data if they wish to oppose developments. G Burton added that Devon Birds will not acquire any further nature reserves as they require a level of professional support and governance that Devon Birds cannot provide. We will look for collaboration with other organisations which have the capacity to help us deliver conservation effectively, and safely, on our sites. The strategy will develop clear guidelines for supporting field study and conservation projects. Priority will be given where we can have a significant voice in the partnership which delivers valuable work with birds and limits our exposure to financial and reputational risk.
The Chairman continued by reporting slow progress on identifying Sentinel Species for further study and investigation. It is proposed to select at least one species of bird, seen in Devon, possibly considered to be at risk, and ask members to participate in providing sightings and studies. The Chairman reported that Dr P Fitzpatrick had stood down from leading the Partnerships Group, in order to take up a position with the BTO. R Sims is leading the Education & Youth Membership Group which is hoping to attract younger members. The Chairman continued by reporting that Devon Birds is continuing to support the Pied Flycatcher project lead by M

Burgess. Support has also been provided to the Barn Owl Trust, and a very successful Wetland Bird Conference was held earlier in the year, run by P Reay. The Chairman reported that M Lock was looking for a volunteer to take over as editor of the bi-annual Devon Birds Journal.

T Utting gave a report on the recently launched new website. He reported that the main features of the new website enabled: members to control their own personal data and preferences; the Branches are able to control their own news and events; there is faster access to facilities for new joiners; articles submitted to the newsletter are published on the site and member self support on any issues that they choose to raise via the Forum. The old website needed to be replaced by a new modern platform to provide simplified admin.

The Chairman reported that activities at the Branches had almost returned to pre Covid levels. Bird surveys are being conducted at various locations. The Chairman thanked N Townsend, A Pomeroy, P Marlow, T Smith and J Turner for their efforts at the various Reserves, along with the many volunteers who assist. The Chairman concluded by reporting changes to Devon Birds Council. J Tallowin, C Tyler and P Fitzpatrick are standing down, and were thanked for their time and service. R Turner will be joining Council to represent Taw & Torridge Branch.

5. **Secretary's Report.** The Secretary reported that meetings had been carried out during 2022 as required, either face to face or via Zoom. Meetings and field trips, at Branch level, had also resumed during the year. The Secretary thanked everybody that had supported the Annual Draw which was, again, very successful. The annual day trip to Lundy re-started in 2022, with 147 passengers enjoying a very good day on the island. The Secretary reminded everyone that the 2023 trip is scheduled for Sunday 21st May 2023, leaving from Bideford at 8am. Tickets are available via the website. The Secretary reported that volunteers are always needed to assist with the running of the Society, there are currently vacancies in a few areas and volunteers are invited, anybody interested should contact the Secretary. The Secretary concluded by informing the meeting that the 2021 Devon Bird Report is currently with the printer and should be sent out to members very soon.
6. **Treasurer's Report.** The Treasurer reported that Devon Birds had spent significant funds on meeting its charitable objectives during 2022. He added that the Society remains in robust financial and operational health. An examination of the Society was carried by Westcotts, and is noted in the Annual Report. The Treasurer reported that his focus for 2023 was on day to day costs; ensuring compliance with various regulatory bodies and to consider the financial implications of the evolving Devon Bird Strategy in the 2024 Budget. The Treasurer reported that there were 1334 members as at 31 December 2022, there were 1378 in 2021. He was pleased to confirm the first full year as CIO No 1191647, the old charity is still linked to new one. He added that the new website has enabled document archiving, preservation and easy access to all publications and has reduced admin on membership items. The adoption of the accounts was proposed by T Utting, seconded by N D'Agorne. Unanimously approved.

7. Election of Officers.

		Proposed	Seconded
Chairman	G Burton	N Armstrong	M Daniels
Vice Chairman	C Randall	L Harris	G Burton
Treasurer	S Churchley	G Burton	M Daniels
Communications Officer	T Utting	A Colston	R Sims
Publications Officer	M Lock	T Utting	N Armstrong
Taw & Torridge Branch Rep	R Turner	K Sims	M Daniels

Elected unanimously on block.

8. Election of Auditor/Independent Examiner.

Westcotts. Approved unanimously.

The new Chairman, G Burton, thanked his predecessor, N Armstrong, for his work and enthusiasm over the past few years.

The meeting finished at 7.46pm.

After a short break for tea/coffee J Walters gave a very interesting talk entitled “30 years Wildlife Watching in Devon”.

Chairman's Report

2023 has been a year of substantial change and a number of debates held to determine the true role of Devon Birds in the conservation world. Council spent time reviewing our range of activities and focussing on how we might deliver the Strategic threads identified in the strategic work form the previous year.

It has also been a year when a number of long-standing officers and Trustees have left Devon Birds for a range of unrelated reasons. Personal commitments, for various family or work issues, meant that we lost Mr N Armstrong, Mr A Coulson and Mrs R Sims in the autumn. Mike Lock retired after many years editing the Devon Birds journal. At the end of the year both our Chair and Treasurer have also tendered their resignations, again for different reasons.

This is not unusual for voluntary societies which rely on the gift of time from enthusiasts who have a range of other commitments and interests. Devon Birds remains in good health both financially and with a strong membership base. At the time of writing advert and job descriptions are being prepared for a recruitment drive in early 2024.

Council initiatives and Organisational Improvements

As reported last year, Council have been developing a Strategy to guide the work of Devon Birds. Progress has been slower than we might have liked though we have been able to act on some aspects of the work during the year.

A proposal to reorganise the structure of Council was approved in the autumn. This will require the recruitment of two key working groups – one to lead on Monitoring and Recording, the other to tackle our Communications, publications, and member opportunities, such as birding field skills training.

The Newsletter will be used to outline these developments and enthuse more members to join this process and help us move forward.

Nature reserves:

Our reserves were re-evaluated as part of the strategic work and Council realised that effectively and safely managing them in the modern era was perhaps too onerous for a small volunteer-led society. We started discussions with the Devon Wildlife Trust on a potential partnership arrangement in which DWT would help with the technical management of the land and work using their existing team of professional staff. This is similar to the way Cornwall BWPS operate in conjunction with the Cornwall Wildlife Trust.

Any formal partnership and changes to how we manage our sites will be clearly communicated to our members and discussed in Council.

The same logic applies to our three remaining bird hides which need more care and maintenance than we can always supply. Alternative ways of looking after them will also be examined.

Sentinel Species and Monitoring

It has proved much more complex than we had anticipated to work out which bird species Devon Birds should prioritise in its work. There are many factors in play, including the role of other organizations, such as the RSPB, how effective our input might actually be and where Devon fits in with UK priorities. At the time of writing this has yet to be resolved but work continues, including an initiative by the Devon Nature Partnership to address the same issue.

This work has not been helped by the fact that our Devon County Recorder, Kevin Rylands, stepped down in April leaving us without a professional expert ornithologist to guide discussions. Kevin was well respected in the birding community and his loss has been keenly felt. Despite extensive searching we have so far been unable to recruit a new Recorder, and this has been partly the trigger to indicate a new structure for our work.

Website Design and Development

The new website is now live and enables our members to access all elements of our work and contribute sightings and photographs.

The branches have their own pages to reflect their activities.

The Devon Birds Facebook Page continues to flourish with advice about where to see birds and beautiful photographs.

Support for Research

Council has provided ongoing support for Malcom Burgess, the RSPB Conservation Scientist, to carry out further work on the migration of the Pied Flycatcher, as noted in the 2022 Report.

Birds were fitted with sensors in the spring and data is currently being analysed by the research team. Results will be collated for next year's report.

Barn Owl Nest Monitoring Project

A message has been recently received from the Barn Owl Trust.

The cameras are all now installed.

Please can you pass on our thanks to Devon Birds for their support. We can only apologise that it has taken so long to complete the project, but it's done now. We will let you know the results after next year's breeding season.

This has given us coverage over another 12 sites and brings the total number of sites to 17. Sites were chosen using the following criteria:

AMSITES in the N. Devon area above the A30 prioritised

Evidence of nesting within the last 3 years

Sites with 2 or less nestboxes (including in-built provision)

The project has been met with great enthusiasm from everyone contacted and there were no refusals to the offer of installation!"

Swifts in churches project

A new project has been developed this year to support a team building and installing bespoke nesting boxes for swifts in Devon churches. Devon Birds has committed funding for up to 12 such installations with the possibility for more in future if successful.

The ongoing maintenance of the boxes will be in the hands of the churches and their parishioners, thus involving the wider community and promoting the messages about the help that swifts need to maintain their populations.

More on the progress of this will be provided in the Newsletters next year.

Branch Activity

East Devon Branch

During 2023 the branch has concentrated on its guided walk programme. This has once again proved popular, although generally numbers of attendees are still down compared to pre pandemic.

The 2024 programme has been finalised and has just been published on the website.

The branch has also started a survey for the National Trust, Killerton, at Ashclyst Farm, as part of the baseline surveying being done as they begin to restore the habitats there. Other individual members are helping with WEBS (Wetland Bird Surveys) at several places on the rivers within the estate.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank Jonathan Ruscoe for his incredible contribution to the branch over so many years, including 11 years as chair.

Jonathan has had to step back from committee work due to ill health. He has, for a long time, been the driving force behind the branch's walks programme and created this year's

and the 2024 programme as the culmination of many such programmes developed using his knowledge and skills. His expertise will be missed but we are truly lucky that he has documented all his years of experience, and this trove of information is now available to the committee.

Jonathan, thank you once again. (Jonathan died on 3 December)

Going forward, I am pleased to say that the existing committee members, that is:

Chris Hodgson, Alex Parsons, Shelagh Parsons, Colin Randall and Terri Small, have agreed to continue in their roles in 2024.

In addition, Colin Randall continues in his role as Council Member.

Colin Randall

Plymouth Branch

The committee of 12 members met 4 times over the year. At our AGM in November our 2 secretaries resigned but another member was elected. We recognized that this year was our 10th anniversary as the Plymouth Branch. The committee duly celebrated at a lunch before Christmas.

Our current membership supports 317 households in the PL postcode area. The first of our 4 indoor meetings covered a presentation about 'The threats and opportunities regarding local birdlife on the River Plym and Saltram' by Pete Aley and an 'Overview of Bird Behaviour' by Ian Gasper. As the speaker at our third meeting was unwell, one of our committee members, John O'Connell- Davidson gallantly stepped in to show the wildlife from his visit to the Falklands Islands. We were pleased to welcome our Chairman, Graham Burton and Tony Utting, Communications Officer and Editor of the DB newsletter, who gave an overview of the aims and work of DB.

At our AGM in November Roy Adams talked about 'Hawfinches and their Habits' from his previous research and time in Hungary. Attendances ranged from 23 to 34. Our 15 outdoor trips covered an area over the Southwest from Breadsands, Paignton to Seaton, East Devon and Walmsley, near Wadebridge in Cornwall. More local venues included Clearbrook, north of Plymouth and Saltram and also 2 evening visits to Cann Woods to look for Nightjar. Several venues proved challenging for birding, linked to poor weather, a distance from home, or an early start. The use of 2 leaders, for each event, proved valuable with groups from 10 up to 31.

Local members carried out 2 surveys on a farm at Bere Ferrers and at Buckland Abbey NT during the year. One public engagement event was arranged looking onto a scrape below

Saltram House NT. Through telescopes we were able to show the public what wildlife was to be found locally.

Two members entertained those at Ivybridge Memory Café with a presentation comparing birds found in a garden in rural Cornwall and in Plymouth. The Branch provided £100 from our own funds towards 6 House Martin nest boxes for Newton and Noss Parish Council as part of a large environmental project.

The Branch holds £693 in an account at Barclays Bank. It recently had to prove its existence as part of DB by seeking a letter from an accountant used by DB to send to the bank.

Liz Harris

South Devon Branch

At the AGM in March the current Chair-Nick D'Agorne and Secretary-Jeff Hacon, both agreed to continue in their roles for the following year. Following the resignation of the Treasurer at the end of 2022 we were pleased to appoint a new experienced member, Roger Little to replace him, starting in April.

The Branch has continued to thrive in 2023, starting the year with a balance of £694 and ending the year with £1043.82. This resulted in a transfer of £293.82 being made to the main Society's funds to ensure that the Branch complied with the ruling that it held no more than £750 in its accounts.

Branch indoor meetings have thrived in 2023, with 7 meetings being held, covering a range of topics. In January, a talk about The White-tailed Eagle proved very popular, with 56 persons attending. February's talk focused on the work of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust and was attended by 28 people. In March, Mike Langman gave a presentation about 50 years of birding and as usual, drew the crowds, with 59 persons present. In April RSPB Exe Estuary Manager, Natalie Holt talked about her role with 38 persons attending. In the summer months the Branch does not hold indoor meetings, however it had 3 outdoor meetings, 1 at Challacombe Down, led by Nick D'Agorne and 2 at Bovey Heathfield led by Prof. Charles Tyler.

The Autumn season started with a local focus for the first indoor meeting, presented by Roger Avery and was attended by 27 persons. In October the attendance swelled again, with 56 persons enjoying Charles Tyler's presentation about the Birds of Dartmoor. The final presentation was a fascinating insight into coastal birdwatching with Rupert Kirkwood sharing his wildlife watching experiences from a kayak, with 57 persons taking part.

Nick D'Agorne- Chair S. Devon Branch

Mid Devon & Exeter Branch

The Mid Devon Branch delivered a full calendar of field meets for 2023. There were 14 walks with 7 volunteer leaders to cover a range of diverse bird habitat including the Exe Estuary, East Devon heathland, the south coast at Slapton Ley and Berry Head, Exmoor and Dartmoor and the fields, rivers, culm and woodland of Mid Devon.

In July, Paul Pratley, former Chairman of the Wildlife Recording Society, gave a day's presentation on the equipment and techniques needed to record and edit the sounds of wildlife. Seven Members of Devon Birds were in attendance. It was a full day of interesting facts and tips delivered by an expert.

Importantly, in September 2022, the Mid Devon branch of Devon Birds was requested to provide a further, more enhanced survey of bird species across the historic Fursdon Estate in Cadbury Devon apart of a wider biodiversity audit that Devon Wildlife Trust ("DWT") is undertaking. DWT has identified and highlighted a range of key species and associated actions and is actively working with the Fursdon Estate in a potential habitat management programme to establish, encourage and maintain certain key species found on the Estate.

The purpose of the new survey was to provide further information to document the species present within the Estate boundary at different times of the year and to indicate bird numbers throughout the year as well as the status and location of each species (resident, breeding, summer or winter visitor, population, density and habitat). In total, 74 bird species were recorded during the twelve-month survey period. We acknowledge and thank Devon Birds member Andrew Thorpe for his able guidance and direction throughout.

The Mid Devon Branch Christmas lunch and end of year review was held at the Swan's Nest Inn on Exminster Marshes on Thursday, 7th December. Those in attendance enjoyed a walk through the marshes to the estuary; eventful because of deep water flooding but rewarding for the views of ducks that had accumulated on the flooded fields.

During proceedings, the Chair formerly announced his retirement and proposed the election of Tom Misselbrook who was duly elected to the post of Chair. Tom will be supported by member Sarah Lewis who was duly elected as Branch Secretary. Helen Allin, Nick Armstrong and Paul Pratley will offer their support on Council. A full schedule of Mid Devon field trips for 2024 is posted on the website.

Finally, a thank you to all members who have helped and given their support in managing branch activities over the last five years of my tenure.

Nick Armstrong

Reserve Activity

Godborough Castle Reserve, Kenwith Valley

For the second year running every quarter of 2023 was “non-standard”.

It was a year of extremes, and the flora and fauna were under stress throughout the year. In mid summer the springs again dried up and the ponds sank to the levels of 2022. We then had endless rain, but the ground waters were so low that it took almost three months for the springs to flow again. The stress certainly affected some of the trees and they are now proving a new food source for the woodpeckers.

It has been a good year for almost everything apart from migrant birds where the shortfall of 2022 was repeated. The nest boxes again did well with the tit family. Jays and both Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers bred successfully. Monthly bird surveys confirm healthy populations of the local year-round woodland, scrub and hedgerow birds, but still no Meadow Pipits or Skylarks. In the autumn, Rory was able to ring a Tree Pipit and a Lesser Whitethroat which were obviously passing through and were new records for the site.

We fenced off the area around the bottom pond to stop sheep grazing. This was achieved using recycled fencing and was enhanced with a selection of bug hotels, basking posts, loggeries and hibernacula. A new drainage channel was dug, and advantage was taken of the low water levels to clear some encroaching reed mace. This gave instant dividends. Butterflies, bees, dragonflies, damselflies and wildflowers all prospered, and we had confirmed breeding of the Small Red Damselfly, a North Devon first. An unexpected bonus of the larger, rough grass area was the moorhens stayed on site all summer. In a new move we linked with the DWT bat survey, a five- year project to monitor bats within the county. The three-night survey identified 11 bat species in the valley by the ponds.

Finch field, our plantation-edge wildflower patches and the woodland glades are developing nicely. We have now reached the thinning stage in many of the plantations as we want to keep the canopy open. The timber has been chipped for pathways or built into wood stacks which are particularly popular with robins and wrens along with a myriad of insects. Tom Parsons, of DWT, knew we had Wild Service and Whitebeam trees. He arranged for Kevin New, of the Meeth tree nursery, to come and collect seeds to propagate and increase their stock of local trees. Luckily, it was a heavy berry year and, as a bonus, he identified another Devon Whitebeam on the site and has promised some saplings if they have any success.

We were contacted by Historic England because Godborough Castle had joined the at-risk register of scheduled monuments, not having been inspected for over 20 years. Following a visit by Cressida Whitton, of DCC, we will be removed from the at-risk register. We have agreed a programme of work in the dyke area which matched our own plans. The main tasks are removing scrub gorse and bramble and opening up the dyke itself, apart from the area where there is an active badger sett.

Philip Marlow

South Milton Ley

Various schemes are under investigation to increase the water flowing through the reedbed to improve its conservation value, particularly in the middle and upper reaches. This will involve diverting and holding more water in the upper Ley.

The South Milton Sandbank has not been as high as in previous winters and has been breached more frequently. The lower part of the Reserve has not therefore been flooded to the same extent, and access along the tracks around the Reserve has been always possible throughout winter 2023/24.

More water is however flowing into the lower part of the Reserve from the stream. This benefit is the result of the decision in 2021 to postpone desilting the stream below the boardwalk. Water levels and potential impacts on access around the Reserve will continue to be monitored to determine when , if ever, any desilting work is required.

Routine maintenance including grass cutting, minor repairs and tree surgery continued. No further reed cuts will be undertaken until the benefits have been confirmed.

South West Water (SWW) now publish online live data on overflows from the treatment plant (Waterfit Live website). Although these combined sewer overflows are permitted under their license, the frequency is considered excessive and duration unacceptable. SWW are being urged to provide a satisfactory response.

Mike Passman's daily blog (<http://thurlestonebaybirds.co.uk/>) provides a comprehensive record of the species seen in the area – 176 in total for 2023, well down on previous years. The low total (the lowest for many years) was attributed to frequent and severe flooding at South Huish and fewer birdwatchers visiting the area.

Alan Pomroy continued to lead the ringing efforts at South Milton, but prolonged periods of wind and rain reduced the number of ringing sessions to 23 this year. Despite this, 980 birds were processed including 167 wintering Chiffchaffs. In contrast, the number of wintering Reed Buntings continued to fall with just two birds ringed.

South Huish Meadowlands

The National Trust continues to debate their conservation objectives for their land in the South Huish area and Devon Birds potential long-term involvement. As a result, Devon Birds lease for South Huish expired on 10 October 2023, and in its place, the National Trust offered a one-year license for Devon Birds to continue managing the wetland. Devon Birds is in discussion with the National Trust to secure a new lease before the license expires.

Most of the meadowlands dried out sufficiently over the summer to resume restoration work on the ditches and regain control of water levels in the scrapes. Work could not however begin until mid-October, after Devon Birds continuing involvement in management was confirmed, and the National Trust confirmed they would pay for clearing the main ditch. Devon Birds contractor, Rory Sanders, was able to start work immediately and cleared the main ditch, sections of the side ditches and the sluices, just before heavy rain set in.

There is further restoration work to be undertaken, including completion of works on the ditch furthest from the sea, as it was too wet to finish the job in October 2023. Other work includes the replacement weir between the first scrape and the main ditch and possibly more work on the side ditches. The precise scope of work will be confirmed in the spring. Devon Birds will not undertake any more restoration work until its long-term involvement in management of the wetland is confirmed and allocation of costs is agreed with the National Trust.

Over the winter, the wetlands have however been flooded by a succession of storms with unusually persistent heavy rain and high tides. The restoration works have performed well but the rate at which the floods dissipate is controlled by the size of the outfall. The storms have not caused any further damage to the outfall which has worked well since it was repaired in December 2022.

For a second year, the Highland Cattle were unable to graze the meadowlands beyond the scrapes as it was too wet until late summer. This area is therefore more overgrown than usual, but it is hoped that this will be redressed in 2024.

Bird numbers and species have been well down over the winter 2023/24, initially no doubt due to disturbance of the restoration work but later due to the poor weather and fewer birdwatchers. Numbers, both birds and birdwatchers, have picked up since Christmas.

Prawle Point Reserve

The reserve is watched and maintained by a small group of dedicated Devon Birds members but few others.

Pig Nose Valley Reserve/Beesands Ley Hide

Nothing to report.

Nick Townsend

Conservation Officer (South)

Bradiford Reserve

Bradiford Reserve continues to benefit resident and visiting wildlife with minimal maintenance, and low visitor impact, using limited animal grazing to control vegetation.

We planted 50 trees over winter to replace the failed Devon Free Tree scheme trees and carried on with the grazing by sheep in Jan/Feb and cattle during September to mid-November.

Wildlife continues to thrive. The Southern Marsh Orchids bloomed and plenty of grassland butterflies were recorded.

We installed a Devon Wildlife Trust Bat detector for the Devon Bat Survey) and ten Species were recorded. Serotine, Daubentons, Soprano, Common and Nathusius's Pipistrelles, Whiskered, Noctule, Grey and Brown Long eared, and Lesser Horseshoe Bat.

In winter the Tidal Scrape, attracted up to 300 Gulls, with Shelduck, Curlew, Redshank, Greenshank, Green Sandpiper and Grey Heron. Little Egret are regular visitors and Cattle Egret are appearing more regularly.

In summer both Reed and Sedge Warblers bred again in good numbers with Reed Bunting and Kingfisher resident.

Otter continues to visit regularly.

Tim Smith

Velator Reserve

No report.

Bird ringing

Slapton Summary for Devon Birds:

Weather:

Windy and wet; wet weather throughout the summer meant only 2 or 3 weekend sessions were possible, though we did manage to cover all of our usual CES sessions and various autumn sessions during mid-week.

Ringing totals and movements:

Ringing totals down overall, due to fewer ringing sessions.

Significantly fewer birds caught, particularly for Swallow and Sand Martin at Torcross, and Sedge, Reed, and Willow Warbler totals showed between 48% - 63% reductions. The only species showing increased numbers were Chiffchaff (up by 68%) and Blackcap (up by 16%), this latter species due entirely to our highest day-total of Blackcaps caught (144 on 30 th September)

CES, which removes the variations due to (lack of) ringing sessions, times and net-lengths etc, shows no significant differences in all of our important species, though both Cetti's and Reed Warblers showed a slight reduction in numbers.

Oldest bird was a juvenile male Blackbird caught in 2017, retrapped for the first time in 2023. We also retrapped a number of Cetti's and Reed Warblers, oldest Cetti being bird ringed in 2020 and oldest Reed W a bird ringed in 2018. No Sedge W were retrapped during

the autumn passage (though we did retrap an adult from 2022) and there were various movements to/from the usual French sites in Loire-Atlantique, Vendée and Manche departments. Fastest movement this year was 381kms caught 8 days later. Two further movements of note were a Blackcap to Land's End, Cornwall(148kms W, 6 days later)and a Chiffchaff to Charente-Maritime (572km SSE, 7 days later).

Habitat Management:

On 28th January, our cycle of coppicing and pollarding the willows and other tree species along the slope was restarted after the delay caused by CoVid.

Events and demonstrations:

We gave talks and/or demonstrations to four university groups staying at the Field Centre and attended the usual Celebrate Start Bay event.

With almost every weekend 'blown out', our regular evening monitoring of the hirundine roost at Torcross was limited to the occasional calm evening mid-week. As usual, this produced various enquiries from interested passers-by. It is always a pleasure to demonstrate what we are doing and allow the children in particular to get close to the birds we catch.

Keith Grant

Risk Management

A strategy of Risk Management is incorporated into our Society's management process. The 2022/23 Risk Assessment exercise is currently in progress. Trustees are required to review and assess the risks the Charity faces in all areas of its work across the undermentioned categories and, where necessary, plan for the management and control of those risks:

- governance
- operational risk
- finance risk
- environmental and external risk
- law and regulation compliance risk

Identified risk is reviewed to determine how likely it is to occur and how severe its impact would be if it did occur. High risk assessments are reviewed with the aim of reducing that risk through control procedures. The Risk Assessment policy is maintained on our website together with various policy documents.

Changes to Council

Nick Armstrong, Chair of Devon Birds, announced his retirement at the 2023 AGM. His wise leadership will be missed but he will still be active in supporting the Mid Devon Branch. Our thanks go to him for his dedication and encouragement.

He was replaced as Chair by Graham Burton. Colin Randall was appointed Vice-Chair. We welcomed Tom Misselbrook as the Council representative for Mid Devon.

In the autumn, our Treasurer, Simon Churchley also stepped down. He was instrumental in regularising the charitable status of Devon Birds, our financial procedures and in many aspects of our IT systems. Many thanks go to him.

Council Members Adrian Colston, and Rea Symes each announced their intention of retiring from Council at the end of the year. Mike Lock retired from the publishing group after many years of service.

On behalf of Devon Birds, I'd like to convey our gratitude to all for their contribution to the success of this organisation and wish them well in their future endeavours.

Secretary's Report

Council Meetings were carried out through the year, online or face to face. A number of Council Members/Trustees stood down during the year, for a variety of reasons, leaving the current Council with a number of vacancies. It seems to be harder to fill vacancies at the moment, with a lack of volunteers. I was planning to stand down this year after completing 12 years in post, but with the Chairman and Treasurer now standing down I have decided to stay on for one more year to provide some continuity for the new Council. A volunteer to take my position in 12 months would be greatly appreciated.

It was very disappointing that the day trip to Lundy was cancelled in 2023, at late notice, due to problems with the MV Oldenberg. Hopefully the trip will run this year on Sunday 12th May 2024 from Bideford. Tickets are now on sale from the website, with a maximum of 150 passengers.

Mike Daniels

STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

The Trustees are responsible for preparing the Trustees' Annual Report and the financial statements in accordance with the Trust deed and rules of the charity, applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

The law applicable to charities in England and Wales requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year, which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources of the charity for that period.

In preparing these financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in business.ⁱ

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011, the Charity (Accounts and Reports) regulations 2008 and the provisions of the trust deed. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Graham Burton

Chairman

Treasurer's Report

We ended 2023 in a strong financial position with an overall deficit of ~£4k.

Receipts were lower than anticipated, though financially offset by a DEF Grant for the 'Devon Church Swifts' project which will incur costs during 2024. Payments were also lower with a general underspend in Projects, Grants, Reserves, and hides combined with some postponed works at Bradiford and SML.

A few headline operational achievements: -

- The transition from a charitable trust legal entity to an association CIO is complete and we now have 2 years of figures for comparative purposes.
- A document archive for members has been populated and you can find all reports since 1929 along with other materials such as society policies and annual reports.
- A Devon Birds Google workspace has been implemented supporting the operation of the society by providing collaborative working tools such as Chat, Meet, Drive, Calendar, Groups, and '@devonbirds.org' emails.
- Branch level access (restricted to Branch officials) to the membership contact details is now provided for the purposes of email and 'local' matters.

Financial Policies updated.

- The Payments policy has been updated throughout the year and now captures all the mechanisms and interactions appropriate in support of our regulatory obligations.
- The Operational Framework policy has been updated to rectify omissions identified by the 2022 Independent review, namely : -
 - *“Devon Birds identifies the need for new Trustees, this may be due to vacancies arising due to resignations or due to a need for Trustees with a specific skill set. After a selection process the Board of Trustees will then invite their preferred candidate(s) to join the Board. New Trustees are issued a role profile along with the Charity Commission Essential Trustee Guide and Trustee Code of Conduct.”*
 - New sections have been added to the policy addressing the appointment and induction of Trustees and the timelines in the AGM context.

The graphics below (our examination pass certificate) give an annualised view of our 2023 Payments and Receipts so you can see the % breakdown of how funds are acquired and spent in year (It excludes payments/received in year but for activities in 22 or 24). Later in the report are the numbers and notes which summarises the formal accounts reviewed by Westcotts.

In conclusion Devon Birds has continued to spend significant funds on meeting its charitable objectives and remains in robust financial & IT health to continue its work for the foreseeable future

Simon Churchley

Devon Birds
Charity Number 1191647

Independent examiner's report to the trustees on the unaudited financial statements of Devon Birds.

Independent examiner's report to the trustees of Devon Birds

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of Devon Birds for the year ended 31 December 2023.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity's trustees of Devon Birds you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ('the act').

I report in respect of my examination of Devon Birds' accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination I have followed all the applicable directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of Devon Birds as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examinations to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

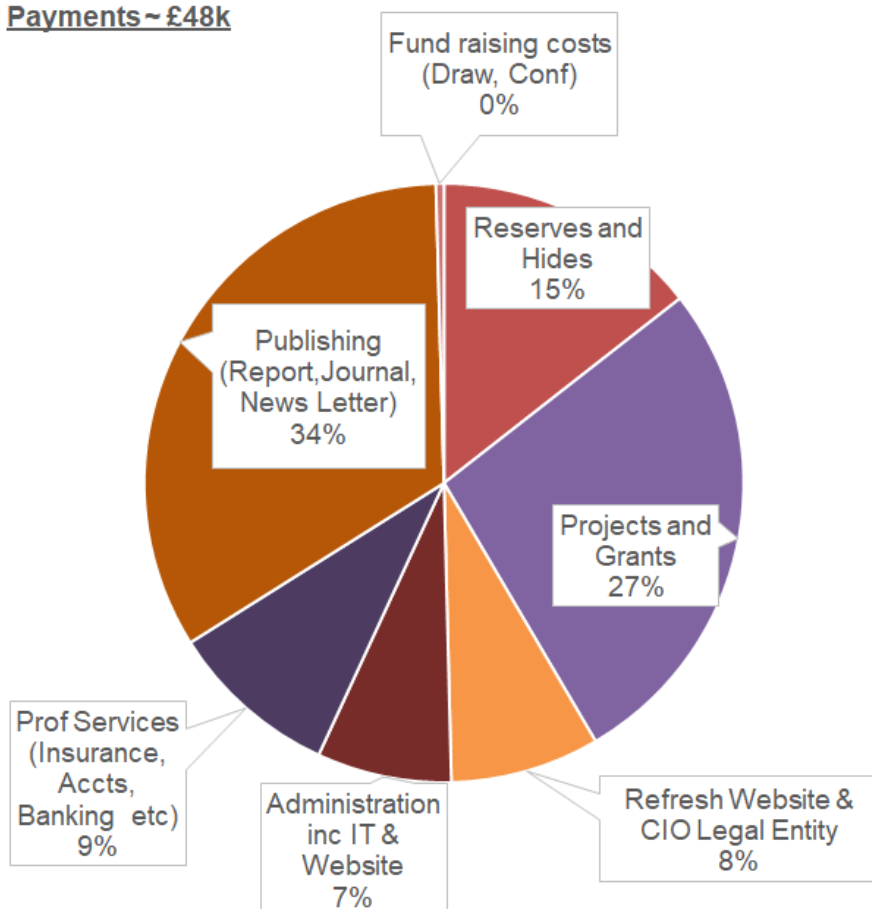


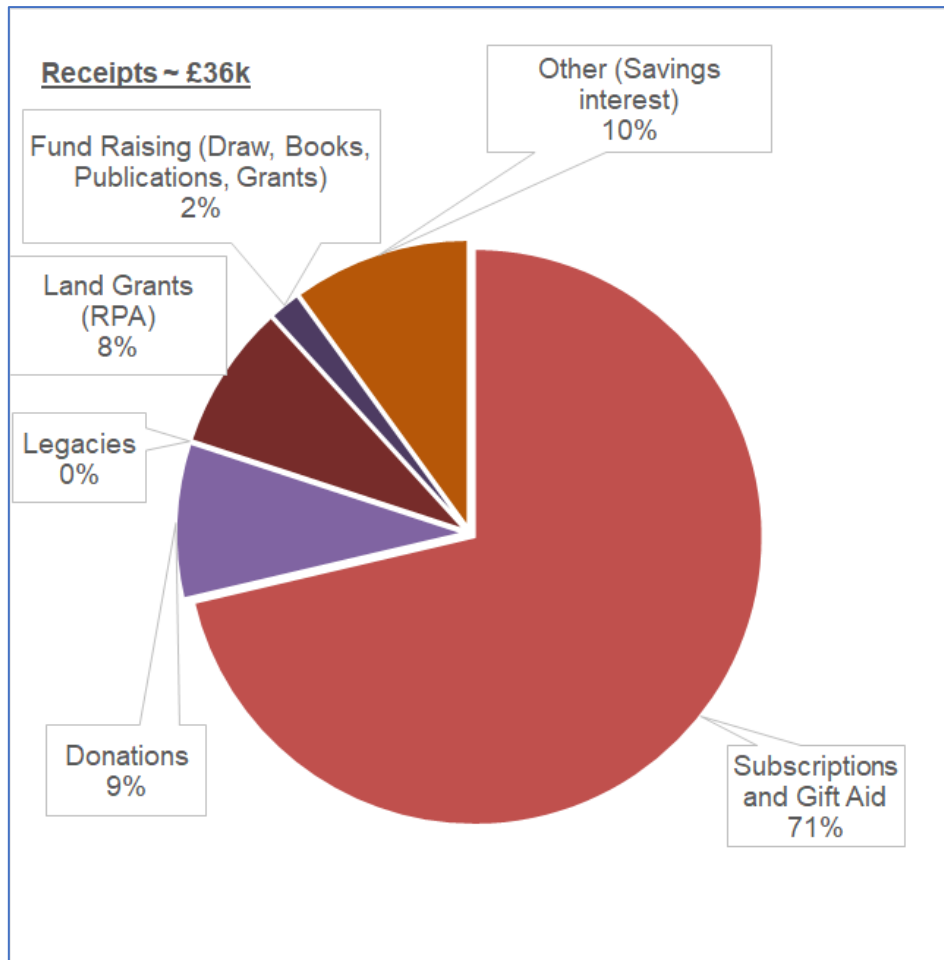
Catherine Williams FCA DChA

Independent Examiner
Westcotts
47 Boutport Street
Barnstaple
Devon
EX31 1SQ

Dated: 1st March 2024

Payments ~ £48k





RECEIPTS AND PAYMENT account for the period ending 2023							
		General		Restricted		Totals	
		2023	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022
Incoming resources	Notes	£	£	£	£	£	£
Subscriptions and tax recovered	2	26,271.80	26,643.51	0.00	0.00	26,271.80	26,643.51
Donations, Patrons, Legacies and Tax recovered	2	3,332.40	60,338.15	5,884.00	5,112.00	9,216.40	65,450.15
Sundry sales and events	4 & 5	4,032.49	11,538.34	0.00	0.00	4,032.49	11,538.34
Other incoming resources	3	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Investment income		3,150.95	782.99	195.89	57.95	3,346.84	840.94
		36,787.64	99,302.99	6,079.89	5,169.95	42,867.53	104,472.94
Resources expended							
Publications	6	16,064.60	16,102.66	0.00	0.00	16,064.60	16,102.66
Conservation expenses	7 & 8	16,036.51	12,216.81	2,603.51	1,060.12	18,640.02	13,276.93
Other Costs	11 & 12	12,431.00	16,155.35	0.00	0.00	12,431.00	16,155.35
		44,532.11	44,474.82	2,603.51	1,060.12	47,135.62	45,534.94
Net incoming/outgoing resources before transfers		-7,744.47	54,828.17	3,476.38	4,109.83	-4,268.09	58,938.00
Gross transfers between funds		-5,230.00	0.00	5,230.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Unrealised gain/losses on investments	13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Net incoming/outgoing resources after transfers		-12,974.47	54,828.17	8,706.38	4,109.83	-4,268.09	58,938.00
Fund balance b/f		221,773.39	166,945.22	14,295.68	10,185.85	236,069.07	177,131.07
Fund balance c/f		208,798.92	221,773.39	23,002.06	14,295.68	231,800.98	236,069.07

STATEMENT OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES @ 31/12/23

	Notes	2023 £	2022 £
Fixed assets			
South Milton Ley		55,890	55,890
Prawle		1,800	1,800
Godborough		45,984	45,984
Bradiford		17,000	17,000
		120,674	120,674
Investments	14	4,768	4,617
Total fixed assets		125,442	125,291
Current assets	17		
Bank current accounts		8,958	3,270
CAF Deposit a/c		134,668	145,119
Virgin Instant Access		88,176	87,680
		231,801	236,069
Total assets		357,243	361,360
Funds	20		
General		291,585	304,408
Restricted		65,658	56,952
Total funds		357,243	361,360

These financial statements were approved by the Trustees on and signed on their behalf by the 2023 Treasurer.

SOA Churchill 27/01/24

Free Reserves (as detailed below) are a measure the Charity Commission uses to 'stress test' charity viability. From our perspective, it defines the available funds after contingency which now stand at a healthy £165K (+57k c.f. 2021).

Devon Birds - FREE RESERVES @ 31/12/23				
				£
Total Reserves per Balance Sheet			£357,243	
Less:	Fixed Assets	-£120,674	Value tied up in illiquid Assets (Land)	
	Restricted Funds	-£23,002	Cash reserved for specific purposes.	
	Working Capital	-£37,689	Our 'FreeReserves' policy is to maintain enough cash reserves to cover normal activities for a 12 month period (with no receipts) based upon the General and Conservation Funds total expenditure for the previous 2 years.	
	Project/Grant Committmer	-£20,678	Commitment made on future years spend	
		£0	This year Commitment	
	Facility refresh	-£10,056	Provision for replacement of Huts, Hides and Tools as required. 20% of total replacement cost per annum	
	Balance of Debtors/Creditor	-£6,688	Balance of Creditors/Debtors at year end.	
FreeReserves			£138,458	
In accordance with the Devon birds Policy (Project Inception and funding policy) , these FreeReserves are				
	2024	2025	2026	2027
Allocatic	50%	25%	15%	10%
'Budget'	£69,229	£34,614	£20,769	£13,846
			£138,458	

In the short term the Trustees believe this conservative approach is appropriate. The Chairs report outlines the ongoing development of a Devon Birds Strategy that will, when complete, link our Charitable objects to actions and projects we plan to embark on to deliver our objects more effectively. The specific actions and projects will inform our financial planning and enable some modelling into the future around which a more informed and objective 'Free Reserves' statement should be possible.

Notes to accounts to year end:- 31/12/23					2023
1. Accounting Policies					
The following accounting policies have been applied consistently in dealing with items which are considered material in relation to Devon Birds' financial statements.					
<i>Basis of Preparation</i>					
The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Practice: Accounting and Reporting by Charities issued in 2019 - CHARITIES SORP (FRS102), applicable accounting standards and the Charities Act, under the Receipts and Payments convention (prior to 2020 an Accruals convention was applied).					
<i>External Scrutiny</i>					
This year's accounts are subject to an 'Independent Examination'. An Independent Examiners report provides negative assurance, namely that no evidence has been found that suggests that the accounts have not been prepared properly, whilst an Auditor's report provides a positive statement as to whether the accounts show a "true and fair view".					
<i>Fixed assets and depreciation</i>					
Freehold land is not depreciated. A register of other high value assets is maintained but under the Receipts and payments convention depreciation is not accounted for. An annual provision for replacements is made within the FreeReserves calculation.					
<i>Investments</i>					
Investments are shown at market value					
<i>Current account Investments</i>					
Where General Funds are not expected to be required in the short-term (normally up to one year) they may be placed in appropriate bank or building society accounts with a fixed term of no more than one year.					
<i>Incoming Resources</i>					
All income is credited to the relevant fund on a receipts basis.					
<i>Resources Expended</i>					
Resources expended are included in the Statement of Financial Activities in the year paid, inclusive of VAT which cannot be recovered.					
<i>Restricted Funds</i>					
Restricted Funds relate to donations and grants which have been provided on the basis that they are only used to support a particular activity as explained in note 21.					
<i>Unrestricted Funds</i>					
Unrestricted funds are those in the General Fund and are available to be spent at the discretion of Devon Birds Council.					

		2023	2022
		£	£
2. Income from donations, grants and legacies			
<i>Unrestricted funds</i>			
Subscriptions		22,443	22,782
Subscriptions tax recovered		3,829	3,862
Donations		2,970	3,055
Donations tax recovered		212	215
Patrons		150	150
Legacies		0	56,919
		29,604	86,982
<i>Restricted funds</i>			
Donation: House Martin and Swift		0	112
Donation: SML		100	
Donation: Devon Church Swifts		0	
Donation: Devon Church Swifts Tax recovered		0	
Donation: Total		100	112
Grants Devon Church Swifts		5784	
Grants Total		5,784	0
Legacies Work On Dartmoor		0	5000
Legacies Total		0	5000
Donations+Legacies+Grants		5884	5112
		2023	2022
		£	£
3. Other Incoming Resources			
<i>General Funds</i>			
		0	0
4. Charitable activities			
<i>Unrestricted funds</i>			
RPA - BPS (Godborough, Bradiford, SML)		1,903	2,342
RPA - HLS (SML)		1,129	1,129
Sundry income		348	149
		3,380	3,620
5. Other trading activities			
<i>Unrestricted funds</i>			
Fund Raising (Draw)		0	1,167
Wetland Bird Conference tickets		0	810
Lundy trip (Return of Deposit paid previous year)		435	5,444
Sale of goods, Books & pubs		217	497
		652	7,918
6. Publications expenditure			
<i>Unrestricted funds</i>			
Journals		7,724	7,190
Annual Report		8,340	8,913
		16,065	16,103

			2023	2022
			£	£
7. Conservation expenditure - Reserve and hide management				
<i>Restricted funds</i>				
SML			0	0
			0	0
<i>Unrestricted funds</i>				
Beesands			240	440
Bradiford			29	1,399
Fernworthy			0	0
Godborough			1,492	1,707
Prawle Point			0	2,490
Roadford			0	54
Slapton Ringing Group			997	0
South Huish			3,141	6
South Milton Ley			3,285	3,622
Velator			75	49
			9,258	9,767
		Total	9,258	9,767
8. Conservation expenditure				
<i>Restricted funds</i>				
Swift and House Martin			604	1,060
Devon Church Swifts			2,000	0
			2,604	1,060
<i>Unrestricted funds</i>				
Wetland Bird Conf			0	1,935
Pied Fly Catcher - Enhanced sensors & Data Analysis			4,300	0
H&S Survey			723	0
Willow Tit Conservation			154	0
Bird Observation Data Validation			1,063	0
Exe Estuary Partnership			540	515
			6,779	2,450
		Total	9,382	3,510
9. Unused				
10. Depreciation				
From 2020 a payments/Receipts approach was adopted for the accounts. As such depreciation and associated assets are no longer reported				

			2023	2022
			£	£
11. Raising funds costs				
<i>Restricted funds</i>				
			0	0
			0	0
<i>Unrestricted funds</i>				
Autumn draw			0	471
Bank charges			622	831
Lundy Trip			205	3,925
Membership Support			222	366
Publicity			0	0
Postage, Telephone & Broadband			523	1,007
Stationery & printing			292	610
Website & IT running costs			1,303	1,259
Website technology refresh			4,340	53
Equipment			0	0
CIO legal costs			0	2300.2
			7,507	10,822
		Total	7,507	10,822
12. Other costs				
<i>Unrestricted funds</i>				
Professional Service (e.g. Ins, Accountancy)			3,781	3,817
Meetings & room hire			709	983
Sundry expenses			114	95
Travel			320	438
			4,924	5,333
13. Unrealised gains or losses on investments				
unrestricted funds				
	Not used			
14. Tangible fixed assets - an analysis of opening and closing carrying amounts				
	Freeholds	4263 units - M&G Charibond Fixed Interest Fund Income (GB00BK1KFP80)		
	£	£		
Cost				
At beginning of the year	120,674	4,617		
Acquisitions	0			
Revaluations	0	150		
Disposals	0			
At end of the year	120,674	4,768		

15. Current assets - Debtors

A payments/Receipts approach is adopted for the accounts. As such these figures are for information and not formally considered.

	2023	2022
	£	£
Lundy Trip deposit	0	435
Gift Aid on in year receipts	187	108
	187	543

16. Current assets - investments

None

17. Current assets - cash at bank and in hand

CAF Bank current account	8,958	3,270
CAF Bank gold account	134,668	145,119
Strike balance Acct	0	
Virgin Bank instant access account	88,176	87,680
Total	231,801	236,069

18. Liabilities - Creditors

A payments/Receipts approach is adopted for the accounts. As such these figures are for information and not formally taken into account.

Receipts received for 2024	6,074	180
Invoices expected, but not paid 'in year'.	800	12,153
Receipts due, but not paid in year	187	
Balance of Debtors and Creditors	-5,088	12,333

19. Trustees remuneration

No remuneration has been paid or is due to be paid to any Trustee from the funds of the Charity.

Travelling and sundry expenses totaling £320 have been paid to 0 trustees and 1 non-trustee during the year.

2022: £437.50 paid to 2 trustees and 2 non trustees.

20. The funds of the charity this year analysis						
	Fixed assets	Investments	Net current assets		Total	
<i>Unrestricted funds</i>	£	£	£		£	
General	78,017.84	4,767.74	208,798.92		291,584.50	
Total unrestricted funds					291,584.50	
<i>Restricted funds</i>						
Bradiford	8,156.00		0.00		8,156.00	
South Milton Ley	34,500.00		100.00		34,600.00	
Swifts and House Martin Proj	0.00		4,760.50		4,760.50	
Work on Dartmoor	0.00		5,077.86		5,077.86	
Devon Church Swifts	0.00		13,063.70		13,063.70	
Total restricted fund	42,656.00		23,002.06		65,658.06	
Total assets	120,673.84	4,767.74	231,800.98		357,242.56	
21. Restricted funds						
	Bradiford	South Milton	Swift and House Martin	Work on Dartmoor	Devon Church Swifts	Total
	£	£				£
Balance b/f 31/12/2022	8,156.00	34,500.00	9,275.33	5,020.35	0.00	56,951.68
Receipts		100.00	0.00	0.00	5,784.00	5,884.00
Share of Bank Interest			88.68	57.51	49.70	195.89
Transferred from Conservation					5,230.00	5,230.00
Restr fund transfers (Receipts)					4,000.00	4,000.00
	8,156.00	34,600.00	9,364.01	5,077.86	15,063.70	72,261.57
Expenses		0.00	603.51	0.00	2,000.00	2,603.51
Grants						0.00
Liquid assets transferred to conservation						0.00
Disposals transferred to conservation						0.00
Restr fund transfers (Payments)			4,000.00			4,000.00
Balance c/f 31/12/2023	8,156.00	34,600.00	4,760.50	5,077.86	13,063.70	65,658.06
The purposes of these funds are:						
Bradiford	Fixed Asset (£8156)					
South Milton Ley	Fixed Asset (£34500).- Excess is liquid					
Swifts and House Martins	Liquid Assets to be spent on House Martins and Swifts					
Work on Dartmoor	Liquid Assets to be spent on Dartmoor located projects					
Devon Church Swifts	Liquid Assets to be spent on providing 14 Devon Churches with Swift box installations. DEF 50/50 contribution towards 12 Churches and 3 talks (£5784 on 14th November, £1446 due on 1.6.24 if T's & C's met).					

The yellow 'fill' records a transfer of £4000 from the Swift and Housemartin Restricted Fund to the Devon Church Swifts Restricted fund.
