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| RAFOS/Sec/24  22 January 2024 | RAFOS Logotype |

**AGENDA AND BUSINESS FOR THE 58th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY TO BE HELD ON SATURDAY 16 MARCH 2024**

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| **Item** | **Remarks** |
| 1. Chairman’s Report. |  |
| 2. Minutes of AGM 2023. | See voting form. The Minutes without annexes are below at page 2. |
| 3. Matters Arising. |  |
| 4. FALO’s Report and Plans. | See page 5 and voting form. |
| 5. Treasurer’s Report and Plans. | See voting form. The grants for 2 of the expeditions are estimates so the Committee asks for the flexibility to tackle any emerging ideas and adjustments up to a total of £2600 for the year. |
| 6. Election of Officers:  Treasurer & Membership Sec  Secretary  FALO | See voting form. |
| 7. Awards:  Best written article  Art & photography competition  Frank Walker Award | Voted by the Committee, results to be published in the AGM 2024 Minutes. |
| 9. Any Other Business. | See voting form. |
| 10. Arrangements for the next AGM | To be announced in the AGM 2024 Minutes. |

*Jan Knight*

J. M. KNIGHT

Mrs

Secretary Bird

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RAFOS/Sec/23

All RAFOS Members 26 Mar 23

**MINUTES OF THE 57th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY HELD AT ROYAL AIR FORCE HIGH WYCOMBE ON 18 MAR 23**

Present: AVM (Retd) M J Routledge CB Chairman

Gp Capt (Retd) K R Cowieson Field Activities Liaison Officer (FALO)

Wg Cdr (Retd) W G Francis Newsletter Editor and Social Media

Representative

WO S M Drinkel Digital Image Coordinator (DIC)

Mr K W Earnshaw Web Administrator

Mrs S F Earnshaw Treasurer

Mrs J-A Wearn Membership Secretary

Mrs J M Knight Secretary

and 13 members, listed at Annex A

Apologies had been received from 28 members, listed at Annex B. Voting forms had been returned by 9 members unable to attend.

1. **Opening Remarks.** The Chairman welcomed all those present to RAF High Wycombe and thanked members for coming.

2. **Chairman’s Report.** The Chairman’s report is at Annex C.

3. **Minutes of the AGM 2022**. The Minutes of the AGM 2022 were accepted as a true record.

Proposed: Mr D R Munday.

Seconded: Mr G W C Candelin.

Votes For: 29

Against 0

Abstain 1

4. **Matters Arising.** There were no matters arising.

5. **FALO’s Report.**

a. The FALO’s report is at Annex D. The FALO commented on the small number of members who attended the Slimbridge event. He wondered if we should continue with this visit in the future, whether a midweek day might be better (fewer people/children?) or a date later in the year? The consensus of the meeting was that the visit should continue in the future and probably on the same date early in the year. One member asked about the possibility of combining the visit with a tour of the Peter Scott museum. Wg Cdr (Retd) Bill Francis said that such a tour would require booking in advance with numbers.

b. The FALO’s plans for 2023 were approved.

Proposed: Mr I C MacKenzie.

Seconded: FS S Berrecloth.

Carried unanimously.

6. **Treasurer’s Report.**

a The Treasurer’s report is at Annex E. She advised that the bank statements gave only a series of numbers to payments with rarely any other identifying details. To help her identify payments made directly to our account she would appreciate it if members could put a reference to the purpose of the payment if possible; membership subscription, AGM lunch or calendar donation for example. More importantly, an email to notify her of the payment and its purpose would be very useful.

b. It was proposed that expedition grants up to £2650 were approved, to be allocated by the Committee.

Proposed: WO S M Drinkel.

Seconded: Mr B G Lyon.

Carried unanimously.

7. **Committee Members’ Updates.** There were no other verbal reports from the Committee. The report from the Membership Secretaries is at Annex F, the Ringing Member at Annex G, the Newsletter Editor and Social Media Representative at Annex H, the Production and Distribution Manager at Annex I, the Web Administrator at Annex J, the Publicity Member at Annex K and the Digital Image Coordinator at Annex L.

8. **Election of Officers.**

a. The Committee position of FALO was due for election. There being no volunteers, Gp Capt (Retd) Keith Cowieson agreed to stand for another year.

Proposed: Mr C P Wearn.

Seconded: Mr J C Le Gassick.

Carried unanimously.

b. The Chairman pointed out that there were 5 Committee posts due for election next year; Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Secretary and FALO. The Committee had agreed that the posts of Treasurer and Membership Secretary would be combined as it would make little change to workload. For all these posts the incumbents would either be unable to stand or wished to stand down and, therefore, he appealed for members to think about volunteering for next year.

Secretary’s note: Mr John Wells has stepped forward to stand as Treasurer and Membership Secretary and Team Drinkel has volunteered to stand as Secretary.

9. **Awards.**

a. Best written article – Wg Cdr Ian Grove for his article “*If you build it, they (he) will come.”*

b. Art and crafts – No award as there was only one entrant.

c. Best UK photograph – Sqn Ldr Jayne Lindley for her picture of a Kingfisher.

d. Best overseas photograph – Wg Cdr Ian Grove for his picture of an Osprey.

e. Best photograph by a novice – Mr Steve Heather for his picture of a Great White Egret.

f. Worst photograph – WO Scott Drinkel for his picture of an Eider.

g. Best portfolio – Wg Cdr Ian Grove for his pictures of an Osprey.

h. Best video clip – Wg Cdr Ian Grove for his video of a Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

i. The Frank Walker Award was awarded to Mr John Wells. The citation is at Annex M.

11. **Any Other Business.**

a. Mr Ken Earnshaw has been compiling a history of RAFOS and he is now adding numerous photographs to it. Once that is accomplished, he intends to tidy up the text to suit. He hopes to have the document peer reviewed and available for publishing in time for the RAFOS 60th anniversary.

b. The Chairman asked the meeting for ideas on how we should celebrate the 60th anniversary of RAFOS in 2025: the 50th anniversary was marked with a dinner in the RAF Club. A member asked if a dinner could be held in an Officers’ Mess. The Chairman pointed out that, with Station catering run by contractors, this option was now no cheaper than commercial premises, a point confirmed by another member quoting an example. The Victory Services Club was suggested as an alternative. The Chairman tasked the Secretary with writing an article for the newsletter to canvass opinions.

12. **Arrangements for the Next AGM.** It was agreed that the next AGM would be held at RAF High Wycombe on 16 Mar 24.

*Jan Knight*

J M Knight

Mrs

RAFOS Secretary

Annexes:

A. Attendance List.

B. Apologies Received.

C. Chairman’s Report.

D. FALO’s Report.

E. Treasurer’s Report.

F. Membership Secretaries’ Report.

G. Ringing Member’s Report.

H. Newsletter Editor and Social Media Representative’s Report.

I. Production and Distribution Manager’s Report.

J. Web Administrator’s Report.

K. Publicity Member’s Report.

L. Digital Image Coordinator’s Report.

M. Frank Walker Award.

**FALO Report for 2024 RAFOS AGM**

**2023 Field Activities programme**. Four outings achieved last year, Expeds WINTER DUCK (WD), SIMMER DIM (SD), ISLAY Mist (IM) and the annual Slimbridge outing. A total of 23 x RAFOS members (+2 others) were involved, costing £2789.82 in RAFOS support. Other tentative/speculative plans came to naught for a variety of reasons - see table below.

* + Exped WINTER DUCK 23. Fourteen members attended, split into 3 teams, and covered 239 WeBS sites from an allocated 254, this was up by 4 sites on WD 20. Unusually, several sites were recorded as ‘Low Counts’ because of poor weather & visibility occasioned by distinctly inclement weather, and a few were inaccessible – e.g. Cape Wrath, due to high sea states following severe gale force winds making it unfit for the boat crossing. Moreover, the 7 Spey valley sites normally covered by the East Coast van were not visited due to a changed deployment plan. Under the circumstances, this was a successful WeBS survey in terms of coverage. Additionally, 62 x BTO Bird Track species lists (at the 10 Km square level) were completed with 1070 records from 105 species with a total of just less than 18,000 individual birds recorded. This latter figure was down from WD2022 by approximately 15%, perhaps reflecting the poor weather and birds’ reactions to it. Nevertheless, species’ diversity has remained fairly constant over recent years at 100-110 species recorded.
  + Exped SIMMER DIM 23. Seven members and 1 x AOS member, resurveyed 131 x targeted & previously-surveyed Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) grid squares in support of JNCC’s Emergency Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) SMP survey in north Mainland Shetland. JNCC & The Seabird Group’s emphasis was on skua and inland-gull nesting species and, in light of emerging concerns over tern species’ breeding failures elsewhere, we elected to survey Arctic tern colonies counted in 2019 & 2021 as well. Although the detailed national data analysis is still underway, with skuas, the emerging anecdotal evidence appears to suggest what all informed authorities had predicted, that Bonxie numbers would be significantly lower (given their disastrous 2021 & 22 breeding seasons), and that Arctic skua numbers may be up. On our survey squares, breeding Bonxies had declined by 55% (60 x Apparently Occupied Territories (AOTs) in 2023, where we had found 132 x AOTs in 2019 & 21). Meanwhile, Arctic skua numbers were up by 67%, albeit from a low base (25 x AOTs in 2023 against only 15 x AOTs in 2019 & 21). Encouragingly, no evidence of HPAI infection or symptoms was observed in either of the skua populations. On gulls, great black-backed gull numbers appeared stable, as did those of common and black-headed gulls. With terns, a different story with some colonies either very late in establishing or missing altogether from where we had surveyed them previously, although numbers eventually appeared to approach previous levels. In addition, the teams completed 47 x BTO BirdTrack species lists from 12 separate 10 Km squares with a total of 664 BirdTrack entries from 67 species recorded in the survey area. Meanwhile, several nest record cards covering a variety of species were also generated for the BTO Nest Record Scheme as were 2 x Nest Incorporation of Debris records for the Birds & Debris website (both Arctic tern), 8 x Pollinator Monitoring Scheme, Flower Insect Timed (FIT) count records for the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology FIT database and several moth records for the NatureScot Heritage Project Officer.
  + Exped ISLAY MIST 23. Eight members participated in this the 14th exped in the IM series, taking part in a variety of ornithological surveys including for the BTO’s WeBS and BirdTrack schemes; for the Islay Natural History Trust (INHT); for Islay Airport’s Management Team. On WeBS, 5 stretches of the extensive sea-loch, Loch Indaal, were covered, as were 10 other sites, 7 requested and 3 sites of opportunity, with 166 records submitted to the BTO, helping maintain a valuable baseline and data to build upon in the future, given the lack of active birdwatchers on the island. At Islay Airport, an area within an 8 km radius was surveyed to provide data for the Wildlife Management Annex of the Airport Manual. Three visits and casual observations from transits through the area were made resulting in a consolidated report of 62 lines of data sent to the airport management. Additionally, a total of 808 records covering 11 grid squares at the 10 km level were submitted on BirdTrack, and to the INHT, with a total of 102 bird species recorded, the lowest count on any Exped IM, possibly due to windy, wet poor weather. Highlights included a group of 5 late swallows, a 2nd-winter glaucous gull and a lesser grey shrike, a new species for IM.
  + Slimbridge Outing. The January outing was cancelled due to ill health so the visit was rescheduled, and took place on 26 Nov 23 with 6 members attending. This was a disappointing turnout and the organiser has suggested it is perhaps time to review whether members are in favour of continuing with this visit.

**Summary of 2023 Programme.**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 2023 | Date | Venue | Leaders | Activity | Sponsored | Attendees |
| 1 | ~~8 Jan~~ | ~~WWT Slimbridge~~ | ~~Bill Francis~~ | ~~Wetland Centre Tour~~ | ~~No bid~~ | Deferred until Nov 23 |
| 2 | 27 Jan - 4 Feb | Winter Duck 23  NW Scotland | Martin Routledge | WeBS | £1200 | 11 Attendees  **(10 + 1 x BTO)** |
| 3 | ~~TBD -Apr/Jun~~ | ~~Scotland / N England?~~ | ~~Keith Cowieson~~ | ~~BTO Woodcock Survey support~~ | ~~~£500?~~ | **Canx, no support** |
| 4 | ~~TBD -May/Jun~~ | ~~Dorset Heaths SSSI/SAC complex~~ | ~~Dave Munday & Ted Barnes?~~ | ~~DIO Surveying Support~~ | ~~No bid~~ | **Canx, no contact from NE** |
| 5 | ~~TBD~~  ~~May/Jun~~ | ~~RAF Airfields~~ | ~~TBD~~ | ~~NE Curlew Head-starting Project~~ | ~~No bid~~ | **Canx, no contact from NE** |
| 6 | 11-24 Jun | Simmer Dim 23 Shetland | Keith Cowieson | Emergency HPAI seabird monitoring | £1100  (+ £139.82)  £1239.82 | 8 Attendees  (7 + 1 x AOS) |
| 7 | 28 Oct – 4 Nov | Islay Mist | Team Knight | Field meeting / Surveying | £350 | 8 Attendees |
| 8 | 26 Nov 23 | WWT Slimbridge | Bill Francis | Wetland Centre Tour | No bid | **6** |
|  | **Total** |  |  |  | **£2650** (+£139.82)  **£2789.82** | **23 + 2** |

* Proposed 2024 Programme. Emerging programme below - following the recent pattern of fewer but arguably higher quality, more focussed events. Serial 3, Exped LINCS CURLEW 24 is still in the Planning Stage (as of 21 Jan 24), and more detail will be available by the AGM.
  + Slimbridge + Expeds WINTER DUCK & GIBEX? Standard recurring outings and expeditions. Exped WINTER DUCK 24 launches on Thu 26 Jan 24, with 14 participants expected. The viability of the traditional Slimbridge outing will be discussed at the Feb Committee meeting.
  + Exped LINCS CURLEW 24. Support to the Natural England (NE) Curlew Head-starting Project by surveying both active and former RAF airfields in Lincs; Barkston Heath, Cranwell, Digby, Waddington, Coningsby and possibly Scampton. Gill Fisher of NE is leading on the proposal to survey the Lincolnshire airbases, using both RAFOS & Lincs Bird Club volunteers. Survey activity during 2024 would be purely to establish whether nesting curlew were present at those sites. Likely support is envisaged to take the form of individuals surveying sites local to them, supported by other RAFOS members deploying, and in partnership with Lincs Bird Club members. The first planning meeting is scheduled for Mon 22 Jan 24 and the FALO has identified 2 x windows of opportunity – weeks commencing 22 Apr & 17 Jun. It is hoped that NE will help share Travel and Accommodation costs incurred.
  + Support to DIO’s Environmental Support and Compliance Team. Give further support to DIO’s conservation team in fulfilling their statutory role in surveying and monitoring biodiversity on the MoD’s estate, both at home and abroad. Possibilities could include Kenya and Belize, as well as UK sites in Devon and Dorset (e.g., West Moors, Lulworth, Bovington, Blandford Camp and Thorney Island - hopefully to be achieved in 2024).
* **Summary of 2024 Programme (to date).**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1 | 26 Jan –  3 Feb | Winter Duck 24 | Martin Routledge | WeBS | £1200 | 14 planned |
| 2 | TBD-Mar/Apr | Somerset Levels? | Pete Evans *et al* | Field meeting | No bid |  |
| 3 | Apr & Jun | Lincs Curlew 24  RAF airfields in Lincs | Keith Cowieson | NE Curlew in Lincs | ~£1000? |  |
| 4 | TBD -May/Jun | Dorset Heaths SSSI/SAC complex | Dave Munday & Ted Barnes? | DIO Surveying Support | No bid |  |
| 5 | **TBD - Oct/Nov** | GIBEX | **Julia Springett** | Joint Service Ringing | **~£350?** |  |
| 6 | TBN | WWT Slimbridge | Bill Francis | Wetland Centre Tour | No bid |  |
|  |  |  |  |  | **~£2550 max** |  |

**Proposed 2025+ Programme.**

* + Slimbridge + Expeditions WINTER DUCK, ISLAY MIST & GIBEX. Standard recurring outings and expeditions.
  + Support to DIO’s Environmental Support and Compliance Team. Give further support to DIO’s conservation team in fulfilling their statutory role in surveying and monitoring biodiversity on the MoD’s estate, both at home and abroad. Possibilities could include Kenya and Belize, as well as UK sites in Devon and Dorset (e.g., West Moors, Lulworth, Bovington, Blandford Camp and Thorney Island - hopefully to be achieved in 2024).
  + Curlew Head-starting Project. Furnish further support to the NE Curlew Survey / Head-starting Project as required.
* Revisit overseas & national venues. Cyprus, Falkland Islands etc? Next BTO Bird Atlas?

**Seabird Group Membership**. Following recommendations from the Expedition SIMMER DIMs 2018, 19, 21 & 23 reports, and earlier agreement, RAFOS membership of The Seabird Group was renewed for a further year in 2023 and assuming Committee agreement in Feb 24, will be renewed this year. The annual subscription rate remains £50.

**FALO Committee position**. Having done 2 tours of FALO duty and a further 2 years ‘holding-the-fort’, the FALO is pleased to announce that a successor is waiting in the wings to assume the position assuming Members’ agreement at the AGM. I will assist the new incumbent as they settle into their new role for as long as it takes.

**Future AGM/60th Anniversary Speakers**. I propose that:

* John Hughes of the AOS be invited to give us a potted summary of Ascension Island (ASI) tern monitoring. While some members have attended ASI expeditions, some of his anecdotes during Exped SD 23 for those who hadn’t, were very interesting.
* Daisy Burnell of JNCC be invited to present again (last addressed the AGM in 2019), this time to give us a full summary of ‘Seabirds Count’ results. Not good for 2024, as she is off on maternity leave in Jan/Feb 2024.

**JNCC’s Seabirds Count capstone ‘end-of-project-conference.’** Finally, for info, the FALO was invited to present at the JNCC’s Seabirds Count capstone ‘end-of-project-conference’ on 6 Dec 23 at Edinburgh Zoo, on behalf of all volunteers’ efforts and contributions. He majored on the “Joy of Taking Part”. The conference was a one-day event, including an evening reception with hot buffet. JNCC’s CEO Dr Gemma Harper opened the event, which consisted of a morning of talks on the logistics of the project and general results, with a few post-break talks on specific species and species groups. After lunch there were panel discussions on causes of seabird population change and a workshop session on future monitoring. Six RAFOS members & SC participants attended, as did Stephen Chapman representing RNBWS and John Hughes representing AOS. A great time was had by all, much networking carried out and linkages strengthened with many of the Seabird Community’s major players. Couple this with the Society’s award of the BTO’s prestigious 2023 ‘Marsh Award for Local Ornithology’ for WINTER DUCK support over the years, and it is clear that our expertise and influence is now widely accepted and respected.

**Keith Cowieson**

**FALO**