

## MEMBERSHIP SURVEY 2024



### INTRODUCTION

A questionnaire was issued to all CAWOS members in July 2024. The purpose of this was to assist with Council strategic planning, and the outcomes to form a basis for setting objectives.

Distribution methods: via email (260) plus posted (20).

Total responses 139 (**50%**).

Number of responses by type:

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Hard-copy by post full questionnaire     | 11 |
| E-mail – a full questionnaire attachment | 48 |
| Partly completed / random remarks        | 80 |

### SURVEY RESULTS

#### Section 1: Publications

##### ***Bird News (BN)***

|                               |                     |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| I read it from cover to cover | <b>80</b>           |
| I browse through it           | <b>45</b>           |
| I don't read it               | 1 (medical reasons) |

##### ***Bird Report (BR)***

|                               |                     |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| I read it from cover to cover | <b>58</b>           |
| I browse through it           | <b>64</b>           |
| I don't read it               | 1 (medical reasons) |

I would be happy to receive *Bird News* in an electronic format

|     |           |
|-----|-----------|
| Yes | <b>71</b> |
| No  | <b>44</b> |

I would be happy to receive *Bird Report* in an electronic format

|     |           |
|-----|-----------|
| Yes | <b>36</b> |
| No  | <b>84</b> |

#### **Summary of comments received in this section**

- Both are excellent (5 respondents)
- I enjoy reading them both (5)
- I enjoy reading *Bird News* (3)

- I keep BR for the bookshelf/ reference (3)
- BR is impressive and a credit to all involved
- The authors to be congratulated /both are informative and good (2)
- BN – please add some photos
- BR – I would like to see a complete list of all birds seen
- I'm not on the internet
- I enjoy the Phil Jones/Ray Scally illustrations
- BN is increasingly interesting
- I appreciate the commitment given
- BR is excellent
- An electronic version of BR would be good for archiving purposes
- Archive BN on the website

Sample of comments in full (verbatim):

1. *Bird Report* is very nice and the format with photos interspersed into the text is so much better than the previous style. But it seems too long and there is not enough 'context' with comparisons with previous years or other areas such as adjoining counties or the national picture.
2. *Bird News*: nicely produced and some good material, but the 'conservation' bit is embarrassingly thin, showing the lack of importance given to it by CAWOS members. And why does it contain the 'round-up' of old sightings - too late for anyone to chase the bird but not verified?
3. *Bird News* is good but there it very text heavy with quite a small font so sometimes I don't read some articles or don't finish them as you need to really concentrate and you can lose your place easily, so it would be better to have a more appealing layout and larger font size, and more white space, that might mean slightly smaller articles, but at least they are more likely to be read.
4. I think both publications are excellent, the bird report in particular gives a real insight into Cheshire's developing (or shrinking) avifauna. One item that would improve its readability (for me at least) is the removal of abbreviations. These really interrupt the flow of reading. Would it cost much more to print 'adult' instead of 'ad', 'juvenile' instead of 'juv', and 'female' instead of 'f' for example?
5. I look forward to receiving and reading both publications. Prefer hard copies, could manage with *Bird News* in electronic format but I think the Board report is worthy being published in hard copy.
6. Excellent, not sure I have any useful ideas about improvements/change. I really appreciate *Bird News* - a well-balanced mix of seasonal bird coverage, personal editorials, deeper look at something interesting, updates on sites and conservation and 'news'. The Annual Reports provide a valuable resource to check up whether what I think is happening to local birds seems to be part of the general picture/in-line with reported trends. As a 'read' it's a bit tedious but that is the nature of Annual Reports. ***The Birds of Cheshire and Wirral*** is brilliant stocktake of what has been happening over late 20th/early 21st century period and how that relates to national and international picture. It may be dated now but I regularly refer to it and enjoy re-reading the 2008 picture - it was very well-written and well-researched. Is an update planned...I'd like that (but it is lots of work and now needs folks with digital skills).

Cont/

## Section 2: Guest Speakers/Evening Talks

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Never attended                                     | 49 |
| Attended at least 1 f2f and would like to continue | 42 |
| Attended at least one f2f but no longer able to    | 22 |
| Topics not always sufficiently of interest to      | 27 |
| I've attended at least 1 Zoom presentation         | 29 |
| Other  | 0  |

### **Summary of comments received in this section by theme (52):**

#### Method of delivery:

1. Zoom – the balance of comments are in favour of Zoom (9)
2. Okay as it is (4)
3. A hybrid would be good (face-to-face also streaming on Zoom)

#### Day/location/schedule:

No consensus or discernible pattern

#### Content:

Keep to British birds (2)

Keep to local (2)

Good as it is with a mix

Some bird-ID sessions please

Prefer if holiday photos include information/some science

Something on new birding technologies please

Include something on wildlife (Cheshire fauna) please

#### Barriers to attending:

Unable to travel/no transport (2)

Too busy

No internet

A reminder would be good, sometimes miss

#### Sample comments verbatim

1. The timing of talks is sometimes not convenient. If it were possible to stream meetings/talks that have previously been held – perhaps on Youtube - so I could watch them at my own convenience, that would be really good. It may be possible already but obviously if so I don't know about it!

2. My prime interest is in the science and ecology of birds, hence I don't often attend the location-based talks, unless I intend to visit the location! But there is a good range of topics in the programme.
3. I believe a number of bird watching groups based in the C&W area are 'affiliated to' or support CAWOS. If CAWOS continues to struggle to get sufficient numbers to attend face-to-face presentations to make them viable, etc., have you considered asking any of the local groups if they would share one of their meetings? CAWOS could tour the recording area - visiting a different group each month. I can think of a number of ways that the collaborations would benefit all parties.
4. Meetings would be good if Zoom (or Teams) could be added to the in-person meetings as I can't make them. I don't think I'd get value from membership if I couldn't watch virtual meetings.

### Section 3 Grants

This section did not include any quantitative questions but invited comments.

There were c.40 comments received in this section, summarised below by theme:

1. A significant number were in favour of 'local' projects (11 comments).  
Note: unfortunately, the original questionnaire did not define the term 'local' (which on reflection was an oversight) but it was intended to imply 'local-patch' or an area known personally to the responder.
2. Use funds at committee's discretion / don't keep hold of large amounts of money/ spend the money/ anything which helps (6)
3. Pay helpers/surveyors/sponsor events (5)
4. Try to reach young people/children/schools (4)
5. Offer to pay for training (for example ringing) (2)
6. Purchase land (2)

Some respondents provided more detail about their ideas - and these are listed below in full:

1. I would be happy to see financial assistance for organisations purchasing land in Cheshire, for nature conservation reasons, such as The Cheshire Wildlife Trust.
2. CAWOS has members who are experienced Ringers within the two main ringing groups in the County, covering the County. These folks ring at key areas in Cheshire and Wirral. Anyone who wants to do any research in a particular species would be most welcome to approach us (MRG/SMRG) with any sort of proposal. Perhaps establishing an active link with Manchester or Liverpool Universities would be a way forward here, particularly if some sort of funding would be available.
3. I think we should be thinking **BIG!**

A nice big idea would be the purchase of some land as a CAWOS nature reserve for access by members. We have enough money to gain a foothold and the idea might engage sufficient

interest and support, including financial (with appeals, grants, crowdfunding etc), to make this a viable project. Think what the local (amateur) conservation group has done at Woolston. But realistically a reserve would require substantial maintenance and management, probably beyond our means. How about approaching Cheshire Wildlife Trust to see if we could share a reserve (which could be a new site or one of CWT's existing reserves; I would not want to mention any particular sites or areas of the county because I know that some people will concentrate on them and I think the most important point is to consider the principles of this proposal)? As well as CAWOS making a monetary contribution, we could provide monitoring and survey knowledge - for which CWT is weak in avian (and some other fauna) whilst they are strong on flora - with CWT having paid staff and equipment for site management. Why not consider the idea and see if something could be done with CWT? (As it happens, the President of CAWOS is the vice-president of CWT and could facilitate some discussions!). Some of the current CAWOS Council might not know (it was 18 years ago) that our breeding and wintering tetrad atlas was largely funded by a grant of nearly £50,000 from the National Lottery to cover its publication, supply of copies to all the county's libraries, and an education programme provided by CWT. So we have history of successful working/sharing with CWT.

4. Conservation, particularly with habitats, specific species. Probably where we can supply the money but with the people on the ground supply workload!
5. Unless CAWOS has hundreds of thousands I would focus on education and training and recording, things that you can make a good local impact with, rather than conservation and research as the RSPB and BTO do that very well. Engaging with people about birds in their area, giving talks to interested groups to the WI, Probus etc promoting birds and Cheshire's birds might get more people interested, I would be happy to give such presentations.
6. (Examples of local projects):
  - The design and installation of bird-focused interpretation boards on publicly accessible land.
  - Creating or enhancing habitats on public land and setting up surveillance recording to measure benefits.

Supporting publications specifically relating to Cheshire birds

Supporting attendance at conferences & seminars

7. I am sure that this type of research had been done before - but in our part of Cheshire, dairy farming has been replaced to a great extent by cereal production. just how bad is the effect on the bird life.

No negative comments were received in this section, suggesting that Council has a 'mandate' from the membership to offer grants for projects which are aligned to the CAWOS Objects (objectives as per the constitution).

## Section 4 - Recording

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| I submit records to BTO BIRDTRACK                                     | <b>41</b> |
| I submit records to other BTO projects                                | <b>58</b> |
| I submit records electronically to another platform (e.g. eBird)      | <b>19</b> |
| I submit paper records  | <b>12</b> |
| I don't submit any formal records and don't keep any records          | <b>20</b> |
| I don't submit any formal records but I keep my own personal records. | <b>21</b> |

No additional comments were received in this section.

## Recording Summary

85% of respondents keep records of some kind

## Section 5 – Social Media

|           |           |
|-----------|-----------|
| Facebook  | <b>34</b> |
| X         | <b>30</b> |
| Instagram | <b>8</b>  |
| WhatsApp  | <b>57</b> |

Social Media Comments (6 received):

- All awful / avoid 2
- Great idea (to have greater presence)
- Facebook and X can be toxic

Sample comments verbatim:

1. I think CAWOS should have a stronger presence on all these platforms and that they should become a recognised form of communication for the society.
2. I would strongly support CAWOS increasing its social media presence. It is a powerful way to reach lots of people. The CAWOS Facebook page is hardly used, with only a few members and one regular poster. Advertising in bird news could get numbers up, as could regular posts by admin. Bird news affecting Cheshire, rarities, society information could all be posted here. I run a Facebook page for our local woodland and, with regular posts, we now have over 1,100 members with good interactions. The CAWOS X page seems much more lively, with members' posts, including mine, reposted by admin. Again, sharing society information, relevant bird news, might help this grow.
3. For me, it depends on what the content would be. The bird-related bits of X are now dominated by listers boasting about how many species they have been to see. I don't think there is any point in adding to that. But it could be worth CAWOS, for instance, advertising forthcoming speakers

and summaries of a recent talk (could increase membership?) and ditto for the publications - annual report and bird news. And if we did organise surveys (see below) an X presence would be a great way of encouraging interest and reporting progress.

4. WhatsApp groups are convenient, but can be dominated by posts from individual users, sometimes off-topic. Whichever social media platform is used, it would be helpful to have and to implement a set of guidelines for users.

## Section 6 – Any Other Comments

24 comments received. Summary by theme:

- Positive: thank you / doing a good job / thanks for the survey / happy with everything (7)
- I might help out next year
- Would suggest Society look at moving from Chairman to Chair/Vice Chair.
- I enjoy visiting Rostherne
- The Boyd Observatory is special - please protect it
- More help is required to spread the workload

### Connections with other groups/societies:

'Cheshire birding' WhatsApp group

Port Sunlight River Park/Wirral Wildlife group

Friends of Lindow Moss

Submits records to SECOS

### Sample comments verbatim

1. CAWOS should consider recruiting or taking over any bird club that are closing. Eg RSPB groups, local club with a long-term view of having a single county bird club
2. I am a member of CAWOS because I spend a lot of my birding time in Cheshire and I feel I should support the local group. However, I do feel very detached from CAWOS, mostly because I do not know the main people in the organisation. I mostly bird in west Cheshire and the Wirral and feel that CAWOS has an east Cheshire bias. I would also comment that several of my birding friends, who are not members, also feel this way. I am not sure what can be done about this, and I should say I am happy to remain a member.
3. I'm a member because of an amateur interest in birds and keen interest in Cheshire's natural environment, stemming from a childhood spent exploring Owley Wood in Weaverham. I don't have either the depth of knowledge or time to be a serious birder, but do enjoy reading the reports of sightings and other items in Bird News and the Report.
4. Perhaps CAWOS could produce an annual calendar? This would use member submissions, perhaps in the form of a competition, with the winners each month going on that month's calendar and the overall winner going on the cover. This would raise funds and increase member engagement. The CAWOS social media channels could be used to gather entries for the calendar. (MO)
5. I would like to see us organising surveys. Tell me if I'm wrong, but have we done anything in the last ten years or more? Our breeding and wintering tetrad atlas (which we started 20 years

ago) showed what the county can be capable of, winning the inaugural BTO award for local ornithology in 2010. It is already past the time that we should be planning, if not already starting, another county atlas, but unfortunately this subject has been met with silence when I have mentioned it to Council and at the last AGM.

Another project could be a Cheshire and Wirral avifauna, first mooted by me about 30 years ago for publication at the turn of the millennium to mark a century since the last complete works by Coward & Oldham in 1900. We are almost the only county that has not done a modern avifauna. At its easiest, this could even be a desktop exercise, based on summaries and reviews of our annual bird reports, although that would surely reveal the gaps in our knowledge that ought to be addressed by organised fieldwork. (Professor David Norman, President)