



### Chairman's Report 2023/2024

It is my pleasure to present my eighth annual report as Chair of the Lothian branch of the SOC. This report will be tabled at our AGM on 9 April as part of our final indoor meeting of the current season.

I was not able to attend last year's AGM as I was away attending a wedding in Malaysia but I will be present this year to chair the meeting and to introduce our guest speaker. Immediately after the formalities of the AGM, Dr Leah Kelly will present the results of the 2023 Hen Harrier survey.

Your Branch Committee, together with volunteers and long-standing supporters, have worked hard to provide a range of outings, discussions, talks and bulletins throughout the year.

My thanks go to Branch committee member, Mike Thornton, and to Jane Alison from SOC headquarters at Waterston House, for contacting our speakers and putting together an excellent programme for our indoor meetings. Since the commencement of our winter indoor meeting programmes we have enjoyed the following talks:

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| September | Dr Pat White – 'Studying Black Grouse ecology in the Highlands'   |
| October   | James Pearce-Higgins – 'The Impact of Climate Change on Birds'  |
| November  | Ian Thomson – Raptor Identification workshop  |
| December  | Roy Atkins – 'Estonia, birds and mammals in an unspoilt land' and 'The Endemics of Dreamland'                 |
| January   | Frances Simpson – 'The RSPB's Nature Prescriptions Project'   |
| February  | Dr Alejandro Onrubia – 'Bird migration throughout Western Palearctic and the role of the Strait of Gibraltar' |
| March     | Maggie Sheddan – Seabirds of the East Lothian Coast workshop  |

We have also run our monthly birding walks. My thanks go out to all of the leaders for giving up their time to reconnoitre and then lead their walks. Please do let me know if you would be able to lead a walk in the future.

The Branch runs on volunteers from our County Recorder, Stephen Welch; to Mark Holling who co-ordinates the Wednesday discussion group; to the Committee who help plan and run our indoor and outdoor programmes for members.

I would like to thank the Branch Committee for their steadfast support over the past year. There is a lot of behind the scenes work that goes into making our programme successful.

David Parmee has been an immense help in running the administrative aspects of our monthly indoor programme, liaising with speakers, and compiling the bi-annual Lothian Bird Bulletin. David also took on the responsibility for co-ordinating our outdoor programme after the sad passing of Gillian Herbert. David has intimated that he would like to step down at the AGM in 2025 and I will be looking to find willing volunteers to take on different aspects of his work (too much for one person). Thank you David for the huge amount of time and effort you put into making the Branch run smoothly.

I also thank Stephen Hunter, our Treasurer, who once again balanced our books. Stephen has provided technical support for our audio-visual equipment at our indoor meetings and has also been involved in the publication of the Lothian Bird Report for longer than I can remember.

My thanks also go to Gill Parmee who selflessly organises the teas and coffees at our monthly meetings.

My final thanks go to Alec Sibbald for his continuing support and for agreeing to help out with the Lothian Bird Bulletin.

Mark Holling continues to run the influential and important monthly Discussion Group. I really must make myself available to assist Mark with the important survey work that the Group carries out.

Mention must also be made of the amount of work and dedication put into his role as County Recorder by Stephen Welch. This is a reminder that part of our remit as a Club is to engage in bird recording.

Thank you to all of our members for contributing throughout the year, either in your participation at events or for volunteering. Our organisation is as much about people as it is about birds and birdwatching.

As the biggest Branch within the SOC, in terms of numbers of people, it is not always easy to meet you all but please do stop me either at our meetings or out in the field to say hello.

Sadly, two active Branch members passed away over the past year. Steuart Ferguson and Flora Ross Russell will be sadly missed.

Richard Leslie

April 2024