

2015 AGM Report

The committee held eleven meetings during the year. All meetings took place at Wexford Wildfowl Reserve on nights other than lecture nights. Once again members took on different roles of responsibility and each person also has an understudy who can assist, or take over a role, when required.

2014 was an extremely busy year as, in addition to our normal work, we prepared to mark the 10th anniversary of the founding of the Club. To coincide with this milestone, a Photography Competition, confined to members and with the theme "Wildlife in Wexford", was held and all entries were displayed at the Club's anniversary celebrations in September. I thank Michael O'Donnell and Janet Whelehan for suggesting it, Nicholas Egan for helping to promote it, Marion Brady for arranging the judging and printing of the entries and Margaret Scally who helped Marion with the display. We looked into the possibility of producing a calendar showcasing some of the entries but to do one in the format and standard we wished would not have been economically viable.

Once again the Club joined with the Environment Department of Wexford County Council to promote a Schools Art Competition, highlighting an aspect of the county's biodiversity, and presented nest boxes to the winning schools. Nest boxes were also presented at Wexford County Council's Environment Awards to schools who had been awarded their first Green- Schools Flag. Last year was the 100th anniversary of the death of one of the county's great naturalists, Major Gerald Barrett-Hamilton from Campile, and a number of members attended events to mark the occasion. Following his lecture in June, Dr. Paddy Sleeman suggested that we should hold an annual Mammal Lecture to commemorate Major Barrett-Hamilton. The committee discussed this idea and agreed that each year the March lecture would have an emphasis on mammals and will be known as the "Gerald Barrett-Hamilton Memorial Lecture". The month of March was picked as the first Thursday of this month is close to the anniversary of his burial in Duncannon.

For the past number of years WNFC has been a member of the County Wexford Community Forum. This ceased to operate last month and has been replaced with the Public Participation Network (PPN) which enables the public to take an active formal role in relevant policy making committees of the Local Authority. We now qualify to be a member of the Environmental Electoral College and, although the Club is not a campaigning or lobbying organisation, the committee felt that by joining this group the Club would be afforded an opportunity to comment on environmental matters which will help conserve the county's rich natural heritage. Thanks to Deborah D'Arcy who is our representative and to Patricia Byrne and John Kinsella who represented us at meetings of the Community Forum.

At the end of November, the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht initiated a review of the legislative controls set out in Section 40 of the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2012 governing the control of burning and hedge cutting. This gave the Club an opportunity to put to good use information gathered from the Hedgerow Survey which has been running for the past two years. A response was prepared and submitted by Deborah D'Arcy based on data supplied by members and compiled by Michael O'Donnell.

The Social Media and Records Policies were reviewed and changes made where necessary.

Federation of Irish Field Clubs

As mentioned in my report last year, a Federation of Irish Field Clubs (FIFC) was initiated by Dublin and Belfast Naturalists' Field Clubs with a view to forging closer links among all field clubs in the country. Although this group has still to be formally established a number of meetings have taken

place to arrange a Field Meeting in Wexford in May, hosted by Dublin Naturalists' Field Club. Marion Brady is the Club representative and I thank her for not only attending meetings in Dublin and Belfast but also for co-ordinating some of the Field Meeting events and lectures.

Events

We had a "wild" start to the 2014 programme of events with waves crashing over the seawall greeting members to our first lecture of the year. Despite changes having to be made to the programme numbers at lectures remained very good with an average of 49 attending and up to 29 people turned out for our field trips. Lectures continue to attract the general public and 29 non members attended during the year. The February field trip was cancelled due to severe weather conditions and the December field trip was changed to Wexford Wildfowl Reserve due to concerns over the weather also. Our March lecture was held at John F. Kennedy Memorial Park and Arboretum and I thank Louise O'Brien and Mairéad Cairbre for their help in arranging this and Ken Foley, John O'Byrne and Gary Wyse for assisting on the night. The April lecture "**Soils of County Wexford**" was replaced by "**Wild Business**" by John Kinsella. The July lecture "**Reedbed and Wetland Ecology**" was also cancelled and replaced by a lecture on "**Integrated Constructed Wetlands**" by Dr. Rory Harrington. September's lecture was moved from the usual first Thursday of the month to Saturday 13th and was held at the Irish National Heritage Park in conjunction with the Club's party which was attended by 65 members and guests. Special thanks to Maura Bell, Bernie Rath and all the staff there for making us welcome and for all their help. I also thank Kevin and Catherine Dundon and the staff of Dunbrody Country House Hotel for facilitating our BioBlitz which had to be changed from Kilmannock House. A very successful Butterfly Identification Workshop, attended by 19 people, was held at Jamestown Nature Reserve and I thank Will Warham for once again allowing us to use this site for our activities. 18 members had a very enjoyable weekend trip to Co. Cork which included a visit to The Gearagh and an opportunity to see some of the habitat restoration work being carried out by the IRD Duhallow LIFE Project. 29 members visited the research building of the Natural History Museum in November. Thanks to all lecturers and field trip leaders for giving their time and sharing their knowledge and experiences especially those who stood in at relatively short notice.

Following a suggestion from a club member a pair of Opticron 8x 32 binoculars was purchased in March 2014 for the use of club members who do not possess their own. These binoculars are looked after and brought to field events by Janet Whelehan and can be pre-booked if required by getting in touch with Janet or any committee member. To date they have been used at nearly every field outing and on the club weekend away in 2014.

PRO (John)

1,800 brochures were printed. As Public Relations Officer, I distributed leaflets to the libraries in the county, tourist offices, hotels and local businesses. Leaflets are also on display at a number of visitor centres throughout the county. I advertised the monthly talks in the People and Echo newspapers and put posters up in the Visitor Centre and on the door of the Pumphouse. For some of the year I worked as Education Officer in the Wexford Wildfowl Reserve and combined my job with PRO work for the Club, distributing Field Club literature alongside Reserve material. Events are also advertised on South East Radio.

Membership (Nicholas)

2014 saw 141 members in the club comprising 79 individual adult memberships, 30 family memberships (with 61 members) and 1 junior membership. We had 13 new members during the year. Our membership has fallen a little over the past few years. A lot of family memberships are just renewing as individual members which is counting for some of the drop. I ask members to promote the club to help our membership grow.

Newsletter (Nicholas)

During the past year there were 4 issues of the newsletter produced. 37 receive the newsletter by post and the remainder receive it by email. I would like to thank everyone who provided articles and photographs for the newsletter. Anyone with ideas, articles or photographs can pass them on to me and they would be very welcome.

Social Media (Nicholas)

Our Facebook page has 198 likes to 2nd February. Michael O Donnell and I have been monitoring Facebook over the past year. We have been trying to post relevant and interesting articles and news reports on the page and also keeping members updated of our own events. It would be great to see more interaction from people on our page.

Twitter has 201 followers. It is updated automatically from our posts to Facebook.

Website (Marion)

Our Website is going from strength to strength and we hope that as many members of the club as possible will contribute to it this coming year. We have a "Latest News Page" which is updated as and when there is news. We would appreciate if the members would contribute to this any interesting sightings or events which might be of interest. We use the "Home" page to describe the club. On this page there are photos, shown as slideshows, which have been sent in by members but we would also like new photos from members, especially those who have not yet contributed. Any changes to venues, dates or lecture titles, are highlighted under "Announcements" on the "Home" page, so please, if possible, check this regularly, especially if weather conditions might prevent outdoor events from taking place. Under the "Events" menu, you will find the calendar for the year, the list of events which are planned for the year and reports of past events. The "Library" menu is divided into different sections, making it easy for you to see which books are available to borrow from our library. The Gallery would be much more interesting if members would send in their photos of either, club events or any wildlife photos they may have. The Newsletter page has newsletters dating back to September 2013, older newsletters are available, if requested, but the page gets cluttered if we keep all of them on it. The member's page is self explanatory, with rates of membership and how to pay. It also has a PDF copy of the programme available to be downloaded. The "Records" page has become very important to the club, as there is now an online "Record Submission" form which, when you click on it, opens a form which can be completed there and then. This form is connected to NBDC in Waterford and it is an easy way to record your sightings. If, however, you don't wish to use this, there is also a PDF form which can be downloaded, filled out and given to the Records Officer. Our "Constitution" and "Social Policy" are under the "About" menu, and there are links to various other relevant websites on the "Links" page.

We are now able to analyse the traffic on the site and for the twelve months from Jan 1st to December 31st 2014 there were 2506 visits to it, 1714 of them were first time visitors and quite a few of them were from overseas. It is your website so it is important that you help to keep it interesting. You can contribute through the usual channels: by email to info@wexfordnaturalists.com or by letter to WNFC, c/o Wexford Wildfowl Reserve, North Slob, Co Wexford.

Library (Will)

We have about 85 books in the library. This includes some leaflets. We now have the library here at the Reserve and books can be borrowed when we go over to have tea and biscuits after the monthly lectures. Since having the books here there has been a slightly improved interest in the library. There is a great selection of books on most natural history subjects. We have added a few new titles during the year. Suggestions for more would be most welcome. It could be a good idea if members borrowed some field guides in advance of field trips. The list of titles can be found on the clubs website. Thanks to Nicholas Egan who made up a cabinet for the books.

Archive (Janet)

2014 was a busy year as I wanted to get the archive complete and ready for our 10th anniversary party in September. This I managed to do with the help of club members past and present who donated newspaper cuttings and photographs relating to the club. Committee members supplied the business end of things such as financial reports, correspondence, reports on meetings and outings, committee meeting minutes, hedgerow survey reports, and all the various aspects connected with the club. All of this information has been put into various albums and folders and on to a hard drive.

It is hoped to continue on into the future with this archive and perhaps to start including more photographs of the various wonderful habitats and wildlife of County Wexford. Thank you to all members who contributed to this archive and I look forward to receiving more contributions into the future from club members as a remembrance of the activities of our wonderful club.

Odonata Project

Recording for this survey was once again very successful in 2014 with a number of species being recorded in new squares. The book is now being prepared for the printers and is due to be published in April. I want to thank members who have sponsored a species, to date 12 of the 23 species have been sponsored. Thanks to all who contributed records, to Nicholas Egan and Chris Wilson for co-ordinating the project and to Zoë Devlin for proofreading and editing.

Records (Michael)

Harm Deenen stepped down as Records Officer at the end of 2013 and the Committee would like to thank him for the tremendous job he did in collating and digitising several thousand records during his time as Records Officer.

During 2014 all the records received to the end of 2013 were checked and all those that were validated were entered into MapMate biological recording software. These included 3,526 records from the Hedgerow Survey in 2013 and, in total, 7,403 records were entered into MapMate.

The Hedgerow Survey, which was started in 2013, continued through 2014. Twelve recorders took part in 2014 counting 21 sections of hedgerow throughout the county. This resulted in 4,035 records, all of which have now been entered into MapMate. In addition, 808 records were received

by email, through Facebook and in writing and these have also been digitised. This makes a total of 12,246 records that have now been received and entered onto computer. We would like to thank all those who have submitted records and would ask that all Club members send in any records they may have. We are looking for records of any species, not just rare or unusual ones. Please send us details of anything you see, even the common species that you see in your garden.

The annual Club BioBlitz took place on 14th June 2014 at Dunbrody House Hotel. Twenty-two people took part recording 364 species.

All the records we received were forwarded to the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC). These records will be incorporated into a variety of recording initiatives including the Atlas of Mammals in Ireland and the Irish Pollinator Initiative. A total of 2,396 butterfly records received to the end of 2014 were forwarded to Butterfly Ireland. Ninety-six ladybird records were forwarded to the All-Ireland Ladybird Survey.

In conjunction with the NBDC, an online form for recording sightings of wildlife was set up on the Club website. We would encourage all recorders to use this form to submit their sightings but sightings can also be handed to the Records Officer or any Committee member.

To conclude, I want to say thanks to all members for continued support, to Cliona Connolly, Environment Awareness Officer with Wexford County Council, for helping to promote the Club through her work with schools and community groups and financial support towards the printing of "**The Odonata of County Wexford**", to Alan McGuire and Chris Wilson for promoting the Club and our recording projects both on their website, "*wildside.ie*" and on South East Radio. Thanks also to The Echo and People Newspaper Groups for publicising our events. Thank you to the staff of the National Biodiversity Data Centre with whom we have a very good relationship and who give the club tremendous support. Special thanks to the National Parks and Wildlife Service for use of the Reserve facilities especially Lorcán Scott, District Conservation Officer, and Dominic Berridge, Reserve Warden, and also to Nicky, George, Andrew and John who prepare the room for meetings and set out the table for our after lecture refreshments. Thanks also to everyone who helped with the refreshments during the year.

Last, but by no means least, I want to thank my fellow committee members. They managed to combine work and family commitments with meetings and, as well as carrying out their own duties on behalf of the Club, were willing to help out with other tasks whenever required. Michael and Simon have decided not to go forward for re-election. Thanks to Michael for not only compiling the records, as outlined in his report, but also for his work together with staff from the NBDC, streamlining a suitable on line recording form for the club. The nature of Simon's job meant he was unable to take on any specific role on the committee but his words of wisdom were always appreciated. I thank them and the other members for their contributions, help and support throughout the year.

Thank You.

Mary Foley
5th February 2015