HOS Open Day, 2018 - St Swithun's School, Winchester
Photos courtesy of Ian Julian

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£1 per ticket, £5 per strip
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There is always a chance you might win!
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RAFFLE
Tickets on sale until 3.45pm
Draw will take place at 3.30pm
Good Luck !!
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A Dictionary of Birds

Jan Julian Photography
natureandpictures.com

# Open Day/AGM March 2018 – a review by Ian Julian

Open Day and a new venue. Set the satnav to St Swithun's, Winchester, easy to find, and a vast, state-of-the-art auditorium. All comparable, if not better than the facilities at the John Stripe theatre, and judging from comments, could well become our new home for this, the annual HOS Open Day/AGM.

True, sound problems were reported from the upstairs' seats (rectified later), and after queuing for too long at one of the coffee points, supplies ran out. When that happens, those queuing the longest had to join the remaining queue – from the back. We British adore queues, if we see one we join it with not the slightest idea what the queue is for, but we hate unfairness, so there were dark, justifiable murmurings. We are assured that coffeegate will not be repeated in future.

Luckily, we were afforded an hour's interval, so not only coffee and cakes, but meeting up again with old acquittances and adversaries, new friendships formed, networking established and a visit to the exhibits, this year, more than ever.

There were several bookstores, and like all the stalls, seemed to be doing a good business this year. The love of nature books is primarily a British thing, it doesn't happen elsewhere, and nature writing seems to be going through a boom period, whilst sales of books generally are finally increasing again.

Andy Mitchelmore has taken over from Brian Leach, who was Treasurer for 5 years. Giving the accounts information, Andy pre-warned us that is was not the most exciting, spell-minding segment of the day. True, but what is also true, is that the Treasurer is the most important post in HOS. None are irreplaceable – apart from someone to volunteer to do the accounts.

Fortunately, this post, like all the others, is usually held for a long time. All societies have arguments and the odd personality clash, HOS being no exception, but for some reason volunteers in this Society, all unpaid, stay in post for many years, and high turnover has never been an issue.

Keith Betton pointed out that membership continues to rise, all is rosy – apart form one aspect that affects HOS like most similar organisations, and that is the lack, almost total lack, of young people. Only one member under-18! Truly shocking and indicative of, well, whatever you like.

So, if you know of anyone, anywhere, not a member of HOS, get them signed up, or sign and pay them up fro a year, it's a good present, whether or not they wish to join, but especially if they are under 40. You don't even have to like them, and they will get an invitation to pay a standing order if they wish.

Don't forget, if you know of anyone living in Hampshire, who refuse to join, they are probably of an unsavoury nature so treat them with just a little caution. We also have a forum, and to enrol in hoslist, just google - 'Yahoo Groups' then enter hoslist or just register here - - simples - https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/hoslist/info

Chris Packham rushed through the AGM part as usual, no boring points of order, no complaints, and then talked about his hero, Ian Newton, who had to call of his talk, due to illness. A hero to Chris because it was he who first gave him the confidence to try his hand at becoming a broadcaster, despite his punk hairstyle and attitude at the time. After 35 years or so, we shall have to await to see if he turns out to be a success.

The first speaker was Chris Hewson from the BTO, who gave us a detailed talk on monitoring the migration routes of Cuckoos, using the modern tracking systems. They were most surprised to discover these birds use 2 routes as they head towards Africa. They knew about those heading towards Italy, but a large proportion head towards Spain, before the Sahara crossing.

All migratory birds from the sub-Sahara are showing declines in numbers, year after year, and as techniques improve, and as tracking devices become ever more advanced and smaller, they will show the reasons. Is it us, is it Africa, is it the migration? Devices will shortly be able to be fitted to hirundines, Swifts, and furthermore will instantly show when an Eagle or Harrier is killed.

Charlie Burrell talked about his vast Sussex Estate, Knepp, https://knepp.co.uk/ . We have read about rewilding, but in this case the entire 3,500-acre estate has been giving over to the project. Nightingales, Cuckoos, Purple Emperor numbers are booming like nowhere else, and with a little management, and the assistance of deer, pigs and cattle, the entire project has prospered; literally so, as it still must make a profit, and it does, all of which was explained.

No chemicals, no fertilisers, no herbicides, no run-offs, no factory farming. Of course, we still must produce food to feed 7 billion people in the world, but corridors like this have to be one of the ways ahead. I think a HOS visit is called for.

Chris took over the main talk, and before long his passion, his knowledge, his exactness came to the fore, the great communicator. One of his passions is photography, and as many of you know, he has his own ideas about this. He spent 40 minutes or so concentrating on photographing a Stilt in the Gambia using bokeh (look it up), backlit into the sun, whilst lying prostate inches away from an untreated sewage farm. Each to their own.

Recently he broadcast a programme about returning to Sumatra after 20 years to meet up with the 'girl in the photo' and the family of those involved in a massacre. As usual, speaking live and unedited, and with no Michaela Strachan to strap on a filter, he bared his soul and at one stage he and most of us were all on the verge of tears. (It is good to hear such passion, and Chris would make an excellent politician but only if he agreed with your points of view!) Stories about conservation, in this case the world wide devastating effect of growing palm oil, are best reflected by the statistics, but combined with a personal story. We all use palm oil, we share in the guilt.

Andy Broadhurst and Keith Betton and their team of volunteers, continue to ensure the smooth running of HOS and this free Open Day; financially stable, bargain subscription, more than a walk a week, excellent publications, science, recording, and their desire to improve year after year.

So a lovely day, with hope (Knepp), science (satellite tagging), photography and tragedy (Chris), and yes, everyone did get their coffee and cakes.

Ian Julian

Oooh, nearly forgot. Total attendance was 381, a new world record – by far. HOS could almost do a stadium tour now and remember this is just an AGM of a local county bird club. I wonder if any other county competes?