



Yorkshire Naturalists' Union
Natural Sciences Forum

Charity 224018

The thirty-fifth meeting of the Natural Sciences Forum held in the Wolfson Room, RHS Harlow Carr, Harrogate from 11.00am to 12.30pm on Saturday 18th November 2017.

MINUTES

Present:

Peter Flint (Chair), Paula Lightfoot (Minutes Secretary), Phyl Abbott, Michael Archer, Jane Baddeley, Alan Braddock, Catherine Burton, Terry Crawford, Roy Crossley, Elizabeth Elliot, Sharon Flint, Nick Gaunt, Andy Godfrey, Audrey Gramshaw, Margaret Hartley, Tom Higginbottom, Valerie Holmes, David Holmes, Roger Key, Rosy Key, Helen Leitch, Andy Millard, Geoff Morries, Geoff Oxford, Roma Oxford, Hannah Risser, Mark Seaward, Richard Shillaker, Carole Sobkowiak, Peter Tannett, Jill Warwick, Robert Welch, Angela Wheatcroft, Terry Whitaker, Ken White, Sarah White.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Margaret Atherden, John Bowers, Charlie Fletcher, Albert Henderson, Colin Howes, John Mather, John Newbould, Adrian Norris, Barry Warrington, Simon Warwick, Kate Wright and Christopher Young.

2. Minutes of last meeting

Minutes of the meeting held at St Chad's Parish Centre on 11th February 2017 were circulated by e-mail prior to this meeting and are available on the [YNU website](#). These were agreed as a true record. The following matters arising were discussed.

2.1 NEYEDC Data Donors Meeting

North and East Yorkshire Ecological Data Centre (NEYEDC) held a meeting of data donors in April 2017 in York, attended by a number of YNU recorders. One issue discussed was the transfer of data to the NBN Atlas, which replaced the NBN Gateway on the 1st April 2017. The NBN Atlas makes all records available to download and use under [Creative Commons](#) licenses. As agreed during the meeting, NEYEDC wrote an announcement for the August issue of *The Naturalist* stating their intention to make the species records held on NEYEDC databases available on the Atlas at 10km resolution under a CC-BY-NC license in the first instance. This replicates the resolution and permissions applied to the same data on the NBN Gateway. Some data may be shared at higher resolution in future following discussions with data donors. Sensitive data such as badger setts or raptor nests will be dealt with separately, and existing agreements restricting data use will continue to be honoured. Any data providers who object to their records being shared in this way should contact NEYEDC on info@neyedc.co.uk or on 01904 641631 by 30th November 2017.

2.2 Residential meeting at Spurn

SW reported that the VC61 residential meeting at Spurn will be held on the weekend of 21st-22nd July. Accommodation at [Spurn Bird Observatory](#) is available for up to 11 people on the

nights of Friday 20th, Saturday 21st and Sunday 22nd July. SW will handle bookings. The YWT visitor centre is almost finished so there will be no disruption due to building work. This will be a social event as well as a recording activity. Basic information is on the YNU website [events page](#); further details and a booking form will be added in due course.

3. Annual Report and Section Reports

BW reported prior to the meeting that the Annual Report and Accounts for 2016-17 have been submitted to the Charity Commission. Section representatives had been asked to write brief reports of their Section's activities but not all had done so. It was clarified that the reports cover the financial year rather than the calendar year. RC reported that the Entomological Section had a hiatus between secretaries this year which may have led to missed communications; he will speak to Bill Ely about writing a summary for the next Annual Report. JW offered to write a summary for the Birds Section. TC asked if requests could be sent to just one representative per section in future to avoid confusion – this was agreed.

4. YNU organisation and accountability for the next decade

TW presented a document entitled '*YNU organisation and accountability for the next decade?*'. The aim of the document and ensuing discussion was "to air suggestions as to where the YNU organisation, administration and accountability should be heading in order to ensure the maximum participation of members and affiliated Societies into achieving the aims of the YNU and spread democratic participation more widely into decisions and policy of the YNU". The full document is circulated with these minutes (Appendix).

Responding to the issue of active participation by members, PL reported that:

- 32 new members and 3 new affiliated societies joined the YNU this year.
- Of those, two spoke at the conference, five had a display at the conference, three have written for the YNU News Brief, one has written for *The Naturalist*, two have organised joint field meetings, three regularly engage with the YNU on social media and one helped with the AGM.
- In 2017, new officers took on roles in the Botanical, Birds, Insects and Vertebrates Sections, as VC Excursion Secretaries and on the Editorial Board of *The Naturalist*.
- The YNU exhibited at the BTO Conference, RES Insect Festival, Leeds Bird Fair and Spurn Migration Festival this year.
- Several new writers are now contributing to the *Yorkshire Bird Report* in response to advertisements circulated by Geoff Dobbs.
- In the last two years, several new people have helped to deliver the Leeds University Field Skills day, sometimes by assisting a more experienced tutor.
- A list of members' contact details and natural history interests has been circulated amongst members to encourage communication and networking. The list only includes members who gave permission for their details to be shared in this way.

It was agreed that this is very positive but more needs to be done to encourage and support members to take an active role in their society - everyone has something to contribute.

AB reported that he has tried to encourage Mid Yorkshire Fungus Group members to attend YNU committee meetings but there was no enthusiasm for this. It needs to be made clear how affiliated societies can benefit from attending.

TC said that when he was Acting Chair of the former Education Committee he would have liked the committee to have a clearly defined remit and lines of communication.

MS stated that YNU members must be provided with an opportunity to speak – the AGM does not allow long enough for this.

On the subject of communication and engagement, MA reported that he now receives records via e-mail and social media, stating that Facebook can be a good source of records, but can also be frustrating as it is sometimes difficult to obtain permission from people to add their records to a database. MS thanked MA for initiating the YNU conference as this is an excellent way to draw public attention to the YNU's work.

RK drew attention to the article in *The Naturalist* by new member Zach Haynes. Zach makes the point that it is important to ask new/young members what they want from the YNU and how they would like to contribute to the YNU.

TC reported that the Conchological Section intend to use the membership list to make contact with members who listed Mollusca amongst their natural history interests.

The monthly News Brief was discussed. PL reported that this is sent to all members and affiliated societies for whom the YNU holds an e-mail address. We don't know how many read the PDF attachment, which is why key information is also put in the covering e-mail along with a brief description of the 'feature story' to encourage people to read it. Several affiliated societies circulate this to their members.

RC stated that he has been a member of the YNU since 1949-50 and doesn't recall a time when the YNU has had so much vibrancy and sheer enthusiasm as there is today. The Union of the future is likely to be less structured and stratified, becoming more dynamic and taking greater advantage of the internet and social media. Some of the formal aspects of the YNU are a necessity due to its status as a registered charity. We need to communicate clearly what the YNU is about, but also need to be prepared to evolve.

KW has been astonished by how few people know about the YNU. PF suggested this has very likely always been the case. Becoming more actively involved with affiliated societies could help to raise awareness of the YNU.

EE stated that the 2017 conference had been notable for its high attendance by affiliated societies who brought displays about their work. It is important to have these opportunities to meet face to face, it broadens the outlook.

RK stressed the need for outreach and referred to his [presentation](#) at the 2017 conference. There are more people 'out there' with an interest in natural history than those who join societies. Outreach to new audiences is important. The YNU should take opportunities to get links to the YNU website from other organisations' websites.

SF suggested that evening lectures would be a good way to engage people.

AM suggested that press releases about issues of local natural history or conservation interest would be a good way to raise awareness of the YNU. It was suggested that information about upcoming events could be placed in local papers. JB reported that Lancashire Wildlife Trust has a regular posting in local free papers.

Many affiliated societies run programmes of evening lectures. AB suggested that YNU members should offer talks about the YNU's history and activities. YNU members do give talks for affiliated societies but this tends to be about their own natural history interests or the work of a particular Section rather than about the YNU in general.

TW thanked everyone for their contributions to the discussion and concluded that there seemed to be overwhelming agreement that communication and outreach are important

priorities for the YNU. A separate meeting may need to be scheduled to discuss the YNU Constitution.

It was agreed that in addition to circulating TW's document with the meeting minutes, it would also be sent to affiliated societies and TW will provide explanatory text for a covering e-mail.

5. YNU Conference 2018

The Yorkshire Naturalists' Union conference will be held on Saturday 7th April 2018 in the Ron Cooke Hub, University of York, on the theme of '*Non-native species: research, recording and the conservation agenda.*' The morning session will focus on surveillance and monitoring methods and will begin with a keynote address by Professor Helen Roy from the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. The afternoon session will discuss the management of non-native species and implications for biodiversity conservation and will begin with a keynote address by Professor Chris Thomas, University of York.

We have booked the Atrium for refreshments and an exhibition. Affiliated Societies and members will be encouraged to bring posters and displays relevant to the conference theme, and the programme will include plenty of time for networking. The conference date and theme is on the website and further details will be added in due course.

6. Any other business

- 6.1 JW advised the NSF about the Stop The Beet Factory Campaign, which opposes the development of a sugar beet processing plant near Allerton Castle by Al Khaleej Sugar of Dubai. Further information on the scale and impact of the proposed development and how to object to it can be found at: www.StopTheBeetFactory.co.uk
- 6.2 RS asked how the funds donated to the YNU upon closure of Hull Valley Wildlife Group were being spent. PF reported that the funds are being used to enable Barry Warrington, former member of HVWG, to give talks about natural history at local schools.
- 6.3 RS said that he is grateful for the existence of *The Naturalist* but that it took 20 weeks to get reviewers' comments on one article he submitted. On behalf of the Editorial Board, AM apologised and explained that this was an exceptional case – it had taken some time to find an appropriate reviewer.
- 6.4 JW asked affiliated societies to encourage their members to submit bird records via [BirdTrack](#), the BTO's online recording portal. This will ensure that records contribute towards the creation of maps which are to be included in future *Yorkshire Bird Reports*. Further information on this decision by the Birds Section can be found [here](#). JW would like to step down from the role of distributing the *Yorkshire Bird Report* to local outlets and would be grateful if another member would agree to take on this responsibility. JW also highlighted the extremely important contribution currently being made by Geoff Dobbs to the Birds Section. In addition to being East Yorkshire Recorder, Geoff has driven the production of the 2013 (and 2014) *Yorkshire Bird Reports*, writing accounts for over 70 species, actively recruiting new writers and a photographic editor, achieving all this despite being out of the country for much of the time!
- 6.5 RS asked whether records sent to VC Secretaries after VC Excursions should also be submitted via [iRecord](#). TW clarified that the Excursion Secretaries' reports include only a synopsis of data. If a VC Secretary is sent a detailed species list they will send this to

the appropriate county recorder. SF stated that when she is sent specimens of riverflies, she photographs them and enters the records into iRecord.

- 6.6 JW asked if anyone would be willing to compile a list of former YNU Presidents for the website. The information should be available from back issues of *The Naturalist*.

Post-meeting note: RC and HL have sent this information to PL who will collate it and add it to the website in due course.

- 6.7 Christopher Young, the YNU's Hon. Librarian, sent a report prior to the meeting:

"As some members may know I had a major operation last autumn and have therefore not been able to get to the library as often as I had. Fortunately this happened after the moving of the Library to Minster Gates. I have been able to continue with processing reprint requests from *The Naturalist* by post and email from home and I try to get to York about quarterly. It has been a great help having Clare Langrick, YNU Membership Secretary, coming into the library to attend to the mail etc. The library was given a generous gift of books by Professor Shay from Welton, East Riding this autumn that my wife and I were able to collect from his residence assisted by his secretary. I would be interested to hear from members if there are any books we should consider purchasing."

PF expressed thanks to all participants and closed the meeting.

7. Dates of next meetings

The next Natural Sciences Forum meeting will be held in early February 2018 at St Chad's Parish Centre in Leeds. The date will appear in the Membership Card and on the website when confirmed.

The AGM and Natural Sciences Forum meeting will be held on Saturday 3rd November 2018 at St Chad's Parish Centre in Leeds, hosted by Leeds Naturalists' Club.

Appendix

YNU ORGANISATION & ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE NEXT DECADE?

By Terry Whitaker

This discussion is intended to air suggestions as to where the YNU organisation, administration and accountability should be heading in order to ensure the maximum participation of members and affiliated Societies into achieving the aims of the YNU and spread democratic participation more widely into decisions and policy of the YNU.

It concerns my perception that the running of the YNU has gradually been reduced [by necessity] to a dwindling number of active people and consequently there is a much more onerous work load and responsibility placed on those individuals. In addition there is a much smaller contingent to take operational and policy decisions and consequently a reduction of accountability.

BACKGROUND

I would like to introduce the discussion and explain and highlight what I perceive as some of the short-comings of our current organisation and suggest a few solutions that might improve the situation.

As this is not a formal motion no decisions can be taken by this meeting It is purely to highlight the situation and discuss and formulate a path towards revision and improvement of the YNU management structure and responsibilities and possible revision of our constitution and standing orders.

The constitution

The current constitution has been in force since 2013 and before that there were few differences from 2003 apart from those intended to comply with the charities commission rules for charitable organisations.

Throughout the objects of the Union have been:

‘To promote the scientific investigation of the fauna, flora and physical features of the historic county of Yorkshire (Watsonian vice-counties 61, 62, 63, 64, and 65), to encourage their conservation, and to pursue these aims through the provision of appropriate educational and scientific resources.’

This is its core function

Note the term ‘**appropriate educational and scientific resources.**’

this should not be interpreted that the YNU is primarily an educational body - it only provides resources for education.

Exactly who is to be educated was never formally stated but it is widely held that it is the general public, the wider general natural history community and statutory bodies; achieved by using its publishing and survey activities.

Changes to the Constitution over the past decade.

The main constitutional change was enacted in 2013 by changing the Natural Sciences **Committee** which had strong powers to direct the Executive into the Natural Sciences **Forum** which makes recommendations to the executive but it has little power to enforce such directions.

Why was this done?

The driving force for these alterations was precipitated by the retirement of the general secretary (John Newbould) who in the preceding decade had stepped in to tirelessly and almost single handedly undertake more and more direct management of the Union’s activities.

With his retirement the Union was precipitated into a crisis caused by a lack of volunteers to fill union posts effectively necessitating ‘direct rule by the executive’ and paid assistants.ⁱ

CURRENT PROBLEMS

We are now starting to revisit the same scenario. Attendance of the non statutory Education and Training Committee dwindled and it was disbanded last year.

Attendance at the NSF is dwindling, possibly caused by its lack of any real power.

Members of the executive are becoming increasingly under pressure because the structure now makes it difficult to disperse their work load to active members of sub committees. Their activities of necessity involves less oversight of the way the Union functions. They are spread thin and are just ‘**getting the job done**’.

What is the most important way the committees can promote the core objectives of the Union?

I think it is by communication.

Communication:

To whom?

In order of importance?

- 1) To our individual members,
- 2) To the affiliated societies
- 3) To the general public
- 4) To statutory bodies

In the past this was mainly achieved by its paper publications and by its annual conferences and other meetings.

In these electronic times paper publishing can be augmented by electronic publishing:

- 1) **Direct E-mail messages**
- 2) **E-mail** carrying attached **.pdf documents**.

See the excellent recently started Monthly News Brief .pdf which seem to have filled the space of the occasional and short-lived Yorkshire Field Naturalist.

- 3) **Facebook**
- 4) **Twitter**
- 5) **The Website**
- 6) **Downloadable documents** from the Website

These are the public faces of the Union

OVERSIGHT

Printed publishing is over-seen by an editorial board and editors of specific reports who are responsible for content on behalf of the Union and distribution lists are compiled or agreed by the executive.

What of the oversight of electronic publishing - currently this is much more nebulous.

- 1) Who receives these publication, is there an agreed distribution list?
- 2) Who approves (i.e. is responsible to the Union Executive & Trustees) of the content of electronic publications or communication?

WAYS TO PROMOTE MORE ACCOUNTABILITY & GET THE 'JOB DONE'

SOME ACTIONS THAT COULD BE BENEFICIAL

With regards to the NSF/NSC discussion as you probably know I feel that a reversion to it being a subcommittee under the executive would be much more functionally useful especially if the executive felt able to delegate some of their decisions to it and a constitution gave it limited powers to direct the. They would then be under much less management pressure.

Consider a possible future structure of a reincarnated natural Sciences Committee:

Full membership could comprise:

- 1) Section representatives -- each section would be **mandated** to send a delegate to each meeting.
- 2) Each affiliated society would be **encouraged** to send a representative to each meeting
- 3) A fixed number of additional representatives would drawn from the individual membership. (Their continuity could be time limited and/or by their attendance record)
- 4) The current Executive Chairman would be encouraged to attend and would have full voting rights.
- 5) The current President would be encouraged to attend and would have full voting rights

The following would be entitled to attend (and speak at the discretion of the NSC Chairman) but would have no voting rights:

- a) Any member of the current executive.
- b) Any past president.
- c) Any current trustee.

TRUSTEES

Why have so many trustees? It is an onerous undertaking and implies a financial responsibility in the case of wrongdoing which may discourage participation on the executive.

Having the whole of the executive designated as trustees is some what unusual for charitable organisations it is not a legal requirement.

Often societies with considerable property designate at least three trustees independent of the Executive from their current membership. In addition the Executive Chairman and the Treasurer usually need to be trustees.

A structure like this safeguards the society from deliberate wrongdoing or simple error of the executive. An odd number of members prevents a voting tie.

ENOUGH from me what are your thoughts? Would you first like to go through the points above and then add your ideas.

ⁱ Following the meeting it was clarified that the retirement of John Newbould did not precipitate the creation of the Natural Sciences Forum or a crisis because of lack of volunteers. Prior to John Newbould's retirement, steps were already being taken to address issues of falling membership and reduction in active participation by members. These included the restructure of YNU publications, merging *The Naturalist* and *Bulletin* into a broader publication with a more reader-friendly format run by an editorial board. The YNU has experienced no difficulty in recruiting members to this editorial board. Upon John Newbould's retirement, the post of General Secretary was abolished and two major reforms were initiated. The first was to place membership administration in the hands of paid part-time staff. This is carried out via an agreement with NEYEDC and is working well. The second was that the YNU Sections were made autonomous. They appoint their own officers and are independent of the Executive except that they need to seek approval if they wish to access YNU funds to support their activities.