Shores of South Devon (marine life interest group)

Steering Group Minutes

6th Meeting

2nd February 2021 19:30 h, by Zoom

1. Present: Toby Sherwin (co-chair), Mike Puleston (co-chair), Peter Jonas, Anne Gwynn, Rob Morgan (Treasurer)
2. Apologies: Celia Hadow
3. Minutes of last Meeting:
The minutes were accepted.
4. Membership and Chairman’s update report (**TS**):
\* Several new members have joined since the last meeting, but **RM** and **TS** need to compare records to make sure that the completed forms and joining fees tally. (This has been done).
\* The Shores of South Devon Youtube channel has been set up. Anyone who wants to put a video on it should speak to **TS**.
\* Keith Hiscock’s talk is now on the Youtube channel.
\* Jack Sewell of the MBA gave a Zoom talk about “Devon’s crabs” on 15th Dec but to date we do not have permission to publish it on Youtube.
\* Nova Mieszkowska of the MBA gave a talk about MarClim on 19th January that was well received. It has now been posted on the Youtube channel.
\* **TS** has now received a reply from Teignbridge District Council who said that they were generally supportive of the Dawlish Beach Hut plan. No further plans are proposed at the present time until there is a clear easing of the Lockdown restrictions.
\* **TS** has agreed a new transect of the Coryton Rocks, Dawlish, with the Rockpool Project. The transect will be used when the project next call for a survey. **MP** attended the recent Rockpool project AGM and was impressed by the enthusiasm being shown by its (generally younger) members
\* Plover Rovers had been contacted and were keen for us to collaborate with them this summer. They recently held an AGM, but no-one from SoSD attended it.
\* Andrew Burgess has not responded to invitations to participate in any recent Steering Group or Zoom meetings and **TS** will write to him to see if he still wishes to be a member. (He has since indicated that he is staying in Edinburgh for the time being, and in a discussion after the meeting **TS** and **MP** decided to relieve him of his obligations to SoSD and to find a replacement for the steering group).
5. Treasurer’s report (**RM**):
The balance in the bank is £106.83 which has been accumulated from new members joining fee. The cash total remains at £17.85. The only outgoing has been £28.78 for two months subscription to Zoom.
6. Safaris and Zoom talks and the Facebook site:
\* There have been no safaris since the last meeting because of Lockdown.
\* Pete Stevens has been booked to give a Zoom talk on Tuesday 23rd Feb at 1930. He will be talking about "South Devon's Birds of Coast and Estuary”.
\* Other planned speakers are John Hepburn from Wembury Marine Centre who would talk about nurse hounds and possibly Ester Hughes of the MBA, although she is believed to be on maternity leave at the moment.
\* **PJ** thanked **MP** for organising the speakers.
\* At the time of the meeting the Facebook site had 666 members and was still very active.
7. There was an extensive discussion about how we should take the group forward when the Covid crisis eases. In particular, there was a general wish to see how we could help fill some of the scientific data gaps that had been identified by Nova M and Keith H in their recent talks. Most Citizen Science projects have been conceived by professional scientists and are designed ‘top down’. This approach does not necessarily fit with the aspirations of rocky shore enthusiasts who, whilst keen to help the professionals, are not necessarily inspired by the rigour expected of them. (One project that seems to buck this tendency is the Great Seaweed Search organised by the Natural History Museum and Marine Conservancy). There appears to be a communication gap between professional and amateur citizen scientists on a number of fronts, e.g.: professionals identify species by scientific names, whilst amateurs use common names; professionals have gaps in their monitoring programmes which they would like to be filled, whilst amateurs are unaware of the significance of some of the observations they are making; professionals tend to be hypothesis driven whilst amateurs are observation driven. (As **PJ** put it the mismatch could be summarised as “Citizens’ observations versus Citizen Science”). One particular problem lies in data recording - many amateurs are happy to post their observations on Facebook, but are daunted and uninspired by the difficulties and time required to record them on one of the established databases. This is compounded by not knowing what observations would be useful. Members of the steering group already have some ideas that could be undertaken by amateurs such as the “Dawlish Beach Hut Field Station” suggested by **CH** and **TS**, and **MP**’s idea of adopting a rock pool (or pools) for a regular survey.
This was an important discussion and was held during the limitations of the Lockdown but in the realisation that internet platforms such as Zoom and Facebook have the potential to change the way in which science is done by amateurs. It was agreed that members of the Steering Group should go away and summarise their thoughts about taking the group forward. **TS** asked that they then send these thoughts to him and he would attempt to synthesise our ideas into a draft strategy document before the next meeting of the steering group. The document would then be circulated to paid up SoSD members for their comments. After that we would have to decide how to take the finalised strategy document forward.
**This involves action by all members of the steering group. Please send your ideas to TS by 16th Feb so that he has time to have a draft ready by the next meeting.**
8. Next meeting:
The next Zoom meeting will be held on Tuesday 2nd March at 1930 h.
9. The meeting ended at 21:00 h.