

MBS Chairman's Speech 2022

Thank you to Gehan for a most interesting talk...

The fact that we are having a virtual, online AGM would have been a surprise not that long ago. We live in strange times, with comets seen in the skies, the death of Queens, and the recent memory of plagues raging through the land. Sometimes it feels as if we are living through the Middle Ages all over again.

We need to remind ourselves that at the start of the season just gone, COVID was still hovering like a Kestrel on the hunt. Social distancing was the rule, and the "Rule of Six" was not that long behind us, having been respected by the MBS on the Heath, if not the Prime Minister.

Lockdowns had meant that we had not had a coach trip since February 2020. That's 20 months!

Our First Coach trip was to Abberton, with no hides available and a maximum of 25 people on the coaches. We were given an I.D. class in white herons, with Great White and Little Egrets both in the same binocular view. We were also treated to female Red-Breasted Merganser.

Our first Local trip was to Rainham. We weren't sure if the Visitor Centre Café was going to be open, and everyone was wary of the hides. We were spread out, and although we reckoned we had nearly 30 people, we were never in the same place at the same time! Our successful run of Egrets continued, with obliging Cattle Egrets in the place they should be, at the feet of cattle. Some of us also got Dartford Warblers, very close to their eponymous locations.

Very appropriately, considering the restrictions we had all lived through, the first Indoor Meeting was Dominic Couzens doing a talk on Patch Birding. Most of us hadn't seen much apart from our local patch for some time...

The December coach trip to Pulborough Brooks was also run on a distanced 25 people basis. We were not guaranteed any service in the café, and were warned we might be served take-aways through a hatch. Despite that we were fully booked.

Our pre-Christmas walk took place, despite COVID and Tube strikes. The highlight was the elusive Water Rail coming out to play.

On December 17th we had the bonus of a Christmas Quiz (cryptically composed by Gaye), and, to celebrate our 40th anniversary, a poem by our Poet Laureate Denis Herstein, a Word-Cloud suggested by members, and a film about the MBS that I had shot and edited that autumn.

That Autumn also saw the fourth of the Seasonal Heath and Hampstead Society Biodiversity Interpretation Boards put out, getting the MBS name and website more publicity to visitors on the Heath.

Our February and March Coach outings were all fully booked, and February also saw a joint walk on the Heath with the London Bird Club. Thanks to Gaye and David Allen for keeping our end up on that one.

About the only snow we saw this last Winter gone was the Snow Bunting that appeared at Minsmere last April.

Once again the coach was fully-booked, and we increased the capacity of the coaches from 25 to 35 for the May and June coach trips, the last of our season.

The last local outing was to Stockers Lake, with Swallows and Terns providing a promise of the hot summer to come.

Toni and Jean had both been working on organizing guided birding trips in conjunction with Oriole Birding. They were announced towards the end of last season, and the first has just ended, with a dozen members enjoying a long weekend in Yorkshire and Northumbria. Many thanks to Toni and Jean.

To bring our season of unusual events to a conclusion, on the Tuesday of July 19th we actually cancelled our Heath walk due to warnings of excessive heat. It was a sobering reminder that, as birders, we witness the effects of global warming every time we go out. Our weather is getting more extreme, more chaotic, and our familiar birds are changing, as our climate heats up. Rare birds may become more commonplace, and old familiar chirps and calls may become less frequent as populations move around our planet in response to variations in temperature and food supply....

Thanks to everyone for attending tonight's Zoom meeting, and thanks to all of you who brought our numbers last year up to over 160 members.

Most of all, my thanks go out to the Committee who have patiently, methodically, and with great humour piloted this group through what we hope is the worst of Covid.

I wish you all the very best of health in the coming year, and Happy Birding!