

Ornithology

At the start of the year there is always the temptation to look over your shoulder and reflect on the year just past, so for a few moments please excuse me as I do just that. It was quite a year for a whole number of reasons, and started with the amazing news that Grand Havre was playing host to a Pacific Diver (*Gavia pacifica*). This was a first for the Channel Islands, and needless to say caused quite a stir for the section. This was a real lesson in identification due to the subtle, yet undeniable, differences that separated it from our commoner species of diver that over-winter in our bays. Imagine then the amazement to find that probably the same bird was back in our waters this month, and what a wonderful way to start 2011.

It has been remarkable to observe just how quickly the Colin Best Nature Reserve has developed into a major over-wintering centre for waders, thrushes and waterfowl. During the cold snap of the first two months of this year, and also the spell of recent cold weather, the reserve has held thousands of birds, only too pleased to find unfrozen water and meadows. We have seen counts of over 400 Lapwings, and over a hundred Wigeon, and Teal, and all this besides Dunlin, Curlew, Golden Plover, Gadwall, and various other species. It was a wonderful moment for me to be there on New Year's Day as a Peregrine flew over, and the sky turned black with the hundreds of birds taking to the wing in a desperate endeavour to avoid being lunch. The other day, just in the middle of the reserve, was a Marsh Harrier. A few years ago this would have been just a spring or autumn sighting; now it is daily.

Over the past few years Paul Veron, his wife Catherine and other volunteers have been responsible for colour ringing thousands of gulls, in particular Lesser Black-backed gulls, at Chouet tip, and other locations. As a direct result of this ringing he is getting a steady flow of information from sightings of his birds around Europe. This amounted to a staggering 1,000 sightings in 2010 alone. In fact he and Catherine travelled to Portugal, and then on to Morocco with the sole purpose of looking for some of the Guernsey birds. They were understandably delighted to find twelve in Portugal and seven in Morocco, which tells us just how far our gulls travel! To see more go to <http://www.paulveron.com/>.

Ornithology continued.....

Our other ringers have also been busy putting in endless hours on their various patches, whether on the cliffs at Jerbourg, the woodlands of Pleinmont, or the reed beds at La Claire Mare. So much of this goes unnoticed, and it is only when they pick up a rarity that others can share in their moment of glory, and are made aware of the hours put in. All of these records have to go somewhere, and this ends up in the lap of Richmond and Margaret Austin, for them to input into a database. To put this task into perspective, Rich reported at this year's AGM that he and Margaret had input 170,000 records this year alone, and the good news was that there were only another 700,000 to go! This is because of the implementation of a new system, and involves going through years of records. They would welcome anyone who has a high boredom threshold to get in touch.

Sadly space does not allow to go through all the many other activities that the section undertakes. Maybe in the April edition I can touch on the final stage of the Bird Atlas survey that concludes this year.

I would like to conclude though with the highlight of December that made the Guernsey Press. This was the arrival of Waxwings to Guernsey. We had noted the influx into Britain, and followed their southerly drift. They are a species that had been on my wish list for years, and when they appeared in a housing clos at L'Aumone and the Rue Cohu, the section was out in force with cameras and optics. They are called Waxwing due to the short red wax-like feathers on their wings, and irrupt out of their Scandinavian homeland when food is scarce. We were overdue a visit from them, and they made a delightful appearance on Christmas Day of all days.

Finally we would be pleased to welcome you to our monthly section meeting that takes place on the first Thursday of each month at Candie HQ. Here we cover subjects as diverse as "what has been seen this month" to debating policies that are impacting the environment of the island, to just enjoying tea and cake and a stunning slide show of members' birding experiences locally or further afield.

Rod Ferbrache



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Environment Guernsey is the wholly owned company of La Société Guernesiaise
We manage La Société's nature reserves and undertake numerous land management contracts for various States of Guernsey Departments, the National Trust and private individuals. We also run the Guernsey Biological Records Centre and provide an environmental consultancy service.
For all aspects of conservation advice and contracting, please contact us.

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Alderney Wildlife Trust	Roland Gauvain	822935
Bat Group	Pat Costen	264500
Guernsey Conservation Volunteers	Angela Salmon	721163
Friends of the Priaux Library	Gavin Lanoe	246715
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NCCPG	Tattie Thompson	239444
Lé Coumité d'la Culture Guernésiaise	Hazel Tomlinson	255891
Meteorological Observatory	Martin Crozier	237766
WEA	David Le Conte	264847

In addition to the Section Secretaries being Council members, other Council members are:

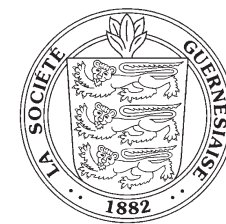
J. Hooper (co-opted), Prof N. Day, Miss J. Gilmour (co-opted), Mrs Judith Keen, Jurat C. Le Pelley and Mrs Sylvia Brouard

Any member of La Société who is interested in joining one of the Sections or groups should contact the relevant Section Secretary.

Office Hours: The office at Candie is normally open between 10.00 and 11.30am on Tuesdays, Thursdays & Saturdays.

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COMMUNIQUE

The Newsletter of **LA SOCIÉTÉ GUERNESIAISE**

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Guernsey's Local Research, Natural History and Conservation Society

Annual General Meeting

The AGM will be held at 7.30 pm on Tuesday 22 March at La Trelade Hotel for the purpose of transacting the following business:

a. To hear the report of the outgoing President, Mrs Pat Costen.

b. To elect a new President. Council will propose that Mr Rodney Collenette, currently Vice-President, should be elected as President. Any other nominations for President should be sent to the Secretary, supported by a seconder, to reach her by Monday 7 March.

c. To receive the annual statement of accounts.

d. To elect the officers and members of the Council. Mrs D. Quartier will be retiring as Secretary of the Astronomy Section and Frank Dowding is proposed as her replacement. A. Ritchie, Mrs V. Crispini-Adams and Miss J. Gilmour will be retiring as Ordinary Council members. A. Ritchie has completed two 3-year terms, and Mrs Crispini-Adams does not wish to stand again; however Miss Gilmour remains a co-opted Council member as Chairman of the Reserves Committee. There are five vacancies for Ordinary Council members. Nominations for the five vacancies, supported by a seconder, should be sent to the Secretary to reach her by Monday 7 March.

e. To appoint auditors.

f. To consider any other matters or propositions affecting La Société. Any member who wishes to make a proposal at the AGM should submit it in writing, supported by a seconder, to the Secretary to reach her by Thursday 3 March.

g. To receive the annual report and accounts from Guernsey Environmental Services Limited.

A full agenda together with minutes of the last meeting and a copy of the 2010 accounts will be available to all members who attend the AGM. Details of nominations for members of Council and all proposals for discussion will be displayed on the noticeboard at Candie from Tuesday 8 March.

After a short break the retiring President will give a 30 minute presentation on Guernsey bats and the threats that they face.

Diary Dates

Friday 18 March: A lecture on Palaeolithic Art by Dr Paul Bahn. Dr Bahn is a distinguished English archaeologist and a prolific writer and broadcaster on archaeology, prehistoric art and early man. In 2003 and 2004, he led the team that discovered Britain's first Ice Age cave art at Creswell Crags in Nottinghamshire. The lecture will be in the Frossard Centre at 8.00 pm and all are welcome.

Subscriptions

At the AGM last March, it was decided that the subscriptions would be raised from 1 January 2011. The overseas single and double/family rates are to be merged to one new rate of £20. Anyone paying by cash, cheque or Standing Order should have made the appropriate change. Members paying by Direct Debit need do nothing. The rates are now:

Local single - £22	Local double/family - £30
Overseas (single, double/family) - £20	
Students - £5	Corporate - £200
Single Life - £300	Double Life - £400

Trip to France

This is being arranged by Rodney Collenette and John Nicolle, and the visit will be to the Loire Atlantique from 1-5 June. For further details, please see the enclosed flyer or the website (www.societe.org.gg).

Annual Sale

The sale will take place on **Sunday 29 May** at 2.00pm at the St Martins Community Centre. Please note the change of venue. It has been suggested that we might try somewhere new after being at Les Vauxbelets for as long as anyone can remember. There will be the following stalls, for which all kinds of contributions will be gratefully received: Plants – Pat Costen, 264500. Cakes – Lawney Martin, 237853 and Julia Peet, 238620. Books – Nature Conservation Section: Denise Thoumine, 723003 and Jane Gilmour, 700024. Bric-a-brac – Tanya Walls, 727614 and Vanessa Crispini-Adams, 238150.

President's Report

Christmas Lunch

Having had to cancel this event in 2009 through lack of interest, it was gratifying to see so many members at the Havelet Hotel this year. Sincere thanks to Lawney for finding such a good venue and for organising what proved to be a most enjoyable occasion with excellent food at a very reasonable price.

Les Sablons

Council discussed at length whether or not to try to raise funds to buy the property and agreed unanimously not to. Alterations would be needed before we could rent the property out as living accommodation as well as as a café. We would have had to dig very deeply into our funds and also to take out a mortgage. The submission of plans and subsequent building would take some time, during which we be repaying the debt with no rental income. The rental needed to repay that debt would have been prohibitive.

We have agreed with Eric Ozanne's heirs that we will vacate the property on 31st May at the end of the first year of the two year contract that we signed with Eric. The three years have been a success. We have raised our profile and offset much of the running costs with the sale of a large quantity of books and cards. We shall be on the lookout for other premises, though it would be difficult to find a better position than Les Sablons, overlooking the Colin Best Nature Reserve. Finding volunteers to man a stand-alone information centre will always be a problem, which is why having Joy Goldsmith as warden, as well as running her café, was ideal. Sincere thanks to her and her team for the sterling work that they have put in during our tenancy.

Accompanying letter

I urge members to read the letter that accompanies this Communiqué. I mentioned in the last Communiqué that we had started acquiring land under Griff's presidency. In fact our considerable portfolio was opened even earlier by Tim Earl and then Tim Peet. We have always tried to maintain a fund for land purchase, but that was emptied last year when we bought another field to further increase the Bridget Ozanne Orchid Meadows at Les Vicheries.

Although the disciplines supported by La Société are diverse and not all associated with natural history, the management of our reserves has become central to much of what we do and touches on all the issues that affect the future of our island.

Pat Costen

Section Reports Archaeology

Last summer a visitor to Herm found a Neolithic stone axe head in the sand on a path leading to 'The Bear's Beach'. September saw the final season of the Herm Project, led by Chris Scarre of Durham University, and one of the trenches was sited to investigate this chance find. This revealed the context from which the axe had eroded: the Neolithic land surface beneath the wind-blown sand which covers Herm Common. Perhaps more surprising was that quite a lot of Gallo-Roman pottery was also found, and it is appears likely that there was a Roman farmstead somewhere on the western side of Herm. Professor Scarre gave a tour of at the end of this year's work and it could be seen that the excavations had revealed more evidence of Neolithic settlement, including slots for buildings. The conclusion to the Herm Project will be a weekend conference to discuss and publicise the findings, which will take place on the weekend of the 21 -22 May. More details will be provided nearer the time, so keep an eye on the website if you are hoping to come along.



Professor Chris Scarre in Herm

In the late summer there were further research excavations at L'Erée, led by Duncan Garrow (University of Liverpool) and Fraser Sturt (University of Southampton). This was their third season at the site, which is situated just above the small beach on the southern side of the headland, a sheltered spot which was occupied in the Early Neolithic period and again in the Early Bronze Age. This year's work revealed a hearth, post-holes from timber buildings or other structures, pits and a ditch. A sample of charcoal from the hearth provided a radiocarbon date of 4320-4050BC (the Early Neolithic period). A large quantity of pottery and worked flint was recovered and also a fragment of a stone ring. The ring was probably a prestige object and is similar to pieces excavated at Les Fouaillages in the 1980's. As well as adding very significantly to our knowledge of prehistoric settlement in Guernsey, the site also provides a context for Le Creux ès Faïes tomb immediately upslope and known to have been used during the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age.

There was plenty of opportunity for local volunteers to join the teams at L'Erée and Herm, but the Section has also continued with excavations at our Bronze Age settlement site west of the Airport. This is in the area of the proposed runway extension and land which will be potentially lost. Unfortunately work here has stopped for the present because the trenches are full of water (complete with ducks on the last check), so we are waiting for the spring to dry things out before we can continue.



Excavations at L'Erée with inset of stone ring found in 2010

In October a skeleton was discovered by electricity workers digging a cable trench at Les Buttes, near St Saviour's Church. This was not a great surprise because the cemetery used to extend further north-east than it does today; the shape was altered in the 19th century when the rectory was built and Les Buttes realigned. The skeleton was clearly a few hundred years old and the Section had the opportunity to examine it. Jenny Cataroche, a Section member with an expertise in this subject, was able to tell that this had probably been a man, aged between 25-35 years of age. There were no signs of injury or chronic disease, suggesting that he probably died from a short illness or an injury. The remains have now been reinterred at St Saviour's.

We enjoyed two autumn lectures: the first being an illustrated talk by Jason Monaghan on recent excavations at The Nunnery in Alderney. This former fort is a difficult site to dig because of the depth of sand, but the excavations have helped to prove that it clearly has the design of a Roman signal station. The second lecture was given by Philip de Jersey and entitled 'Different Iron Ages', and looked at changing interpretations of the Iron Age in the Channel Islands and in particular at the differences between the evidence from Guernsey and that of Jersey.

The Section is continuing to monitor coastal erosion sites, collecting and recording the flint and prehistoric pottery which washes out. We meet most Wednesday mornings and Thursday evenings, so if you are interested in coming along then do get in touch. **On Friday 18 March** there will be a lecture on Palaeolithic Art by Dr Paul Bahn. Dr Bahn is a distinguished English archaeologist and a prolific writer and broadcaster on archaeology, prehistoric art and early man. In 2003 and 2004, he led the team that discovered Britain's first Ice Age cave art at Creswell Crags in Nottinghamshire. The lecture will be in the Frossard theatre at 8.00 pm and all are welcome.

Botany

PROGRAMME FOR MEETINGS IN 2011. All will take place at 2.15 for 2.30 pm on the first Saturday of the month.

Mar Route du Houguet, for Les Tranquesous, P22C3. Park along road - Jersey fern and spring flowers

Apr Jerbourg - park by kiosk, P31H4 - clifftop walk - early purple orchids

May Fort Hommet, Vazon, P13F2, car park below hill - coastal flowers

Jun Fort Doyle, P7H2, park at end - Orange Bird's Foot etc.

Jul Ozanne Reserve, L'Ancresse, P6B4, car park at Lucksall on Amarreurs Rd - Orchids and common

Aug Pleinmont, P32C4, cliff top car park - heather and coastal plants

Sep Richmond end of Vazon, P13G3, car park at road bend - Great Horsetail etc.

Oct Vale: Late summer flowers on hill, P11G2, coast car park near ramp to castle

Nov Petit Bot, P29F4, park at bottom by café - ferns, mosses, fungi etc.

Dec Les Vauxbelets, P23E4, park down hill just off road - a winter walk

Subscriptions of £3 are now due. You will receive a monthly newsletter, either by post or email.

Please send a cheque to Soc. Guernesaise Botany Section with your details to Jean and Gavin Sampson, The Ferrers, 1 Milton Gardens, Rue Cauchée, St Martins, Guernsey GY4 6NU, Tel: 234430, email: gavsampson@cwgsy.net. Send your name, address, postcode and telephone number, and your email address if you wish to receive your newsletter that way.

Geology

Wednesday 9 March - venue to be announced. This summer we will spend some time checking and updating our Rocks and Scenery book.

Wednesday 13 April - our first "book walk" along the coast of L'Erée headland. Meet at "Prosperity car park" at 7.00 pm.

Wednesday 11 May - a walk down the cliff path to Moulin Huet bay to look at the caves on the beach. Meet at Moulin Huet car park at 7.00 pm.

Wednesday 8 June - to be announced.

Wednesday 6 July - a look at the contact zones to the west of the bay. Meet at "La Mirage" car park at 7.00 pm

Andy Dorey

Juniors

In October Andy Dorey organised a geology outing at Beaucette Marina. His colleague Dave Dorey came along and gave a most interesting description of the various rocks and how they were formed. Blasting to create the marina entrance had exposed rock faces that enabled the juniors - and their parents - to see our ancient rocks more clearly.



Archaeology

Also in October we had a call from Tanya Walls inviting us to a viewing of the St Saviour skeleton. Jenny Cataroche who is probably the only person in Guernsey qualified in paleopathology was there to describe what we were looking at and to demonstrate the significant features. Tanya had also brought some skeletal specimens from the stores to help the children understand the marked differences that can occur from one person to the next, depending on such aspects as gender, age, health and ethnicity.

Microscopes

In November Charles David led a session using the Imperial College microscopes at Candie. These instruments are stored by Charles at La Société HQ and used by the marine biology students from the university when they come over each year. Charles had brought jars of water from the harbour and the children were astonished to see the many minute creatures it contained. They were also sent out into Candie gardens to find bits of wood which also proved to contain all sorts of specimens.

Astronomy

There was no December meeting, but in January we were invited to the astronomy observatory where an initially cloudy sky took us indoors for a splendid slide presentation of the planets given by Debby Quartier. The clouds then parted and we went outside, where Geoff Falla and Roger Chandler had set up the telescope to give us the hoped-for view of our small part of the sky.

The children who come along to these meetings really do receive a very rich and diverse amount of knowledge from the representatives of the different sections who are always ready to share their expertise.

The section is open to any junior who is a member in their own right or whose parents have taken out family membership. Meetings are advertised on the website and all are welcome.

Next meeting

Saturday 19 February

at 2.00pm at the Frossard Centre: Council member Sylvia Brouard who is a gold-accredited tour guide, will give a talk on The Occupation.

Pat Costen

Entomology

The Entomology Section will meet with the Botany and Nature Conservation Sections for their monthly outings in 2011. Please see these Sections for times and places.

Family History

Those members who attended the November meeting were taken back by Brian de Jersey to "When the Abbot and the Duke of Normandy first met".

The Annual General Meeting followed this interesting talk, at which those on the Committee were re-elected. One, David Wylie, gave notice that he would like someone to come forward to replace him.

We hope that this year's subjects for the monthly meetings will be of interest to all. One doesn't have to be a member of the Section to attend.

All meetings are held in the Frossard Centre, Candie, beginning at 7.45 pm, unless otherwise stated. All welcome.

16 February: Roddy Ray - "Pilotage in the Channel Islands"
16 March: Brian Vandertang - "My Dutch Ancestry"
18 May: Sir Geoffrey Rowland - "The Evolution of the Guernsey Constitution"

Any family history queries should be addressed to The Family History Section, PO Box 314, St Peter Port, Guernsey GY1 3TG.

Edith Le Patourel

Guernsey Museum and Art Gallery

Guernsey Museum & Art Gallery is to be progressively redisplayed between 2011 and 2013. The Museums Director is keen to receive the thoughts of members of La Société as to what they would most like to see on display. A questionnaire is available from the front desk of the museum and is also on the Museums website www.museums.gov.gg