

June 2026 | Issue No. 119

La Société Guernesiaise Newsletter



La Société COMMUNIQUÉ

For nature, history and
science in Guernsey





From the Président

I am delighted, and humbled, to have been elected President of La Société at the AGM in March. The last eight weeks have been the predictable learning curve, and I am grateful to immediate past president Trevor Bourgaize for his support, and for his many continuing years of generous service to the Société.

I was happy to note, at my first Council meeting, that most of the faces around the table were much younger than mine! One such is Callum Tostevin-Hall, secretary of the Historic Buildings Section, who in April was elected by Council to serve for a year as Vice President of the Société. I am pleased too that, under the

leadership of Tracey Ozanne, the Family History Section goes from strength to strength, as also the Astronomy and Zoology sections, both with new leaders in the past few months; the dedication and enthusiasm of these and all leaders form the lifeblood of our organisation.

My own admiration for the work of the Société began when, a rather green reporter at Radio Guernsey, I was sent to interview Marie de Garis on the publication of a new edition of her Dictionnaire Angllais-Guernesiais. A redoubtable past president, she had no truck with here-today-gone-tomorrow media types, however we shared a genuine interest in language and the importance of Guernesiais, and I feel privileged to have known her.

Around that time, again on Radio Guernsey, Tim Peet was a regular contributor to my mid-morning programme, recording on location and bringing the life of the cliffs and the sea shore into the studio; and a little later David le Conte delivered fascinating and mind-stretching astronomy features. In these past presidents, and those before and since, the Société firmly established its reputation for rigorous research and systematic recording of data, together with education about and conservation of Guernsey's natural environment and heritage. It's a tradition I am proud to be part of.

I believe continued collaboration with National Trust of Guernsey, the Nature Commission, and ongoing dialogue with Agriculture, Countryside and Land Management Services and Planning will be increasingly important in our joint projects, going forward. Our mission, to encourage islanders to enjoy the natural environment whilst respecting and protecting it, is assisted by early meetings with partner organisations to discuss new initiatives, in order to identify and build on common ground. La Société was delighted to be invited by NT Guernsey to stage a Royal Golden Guernsey Goats conference last month at Les Caches Farm, and we look forward to welcoming two Royal Golden Guernsey kids to join our conservation herd later this summer. We are pleased to be able

to cooperate with NT Guernsey and ACLMS on sustainable grazing, and will look for further collaboration of this kind going forward.

Early summer is upon us, the orchid fields are in full bloom, and we acknowledge with gratitude the generous donation by the Martel family of an additional field at Rue des Vicheries. June hedge cutting is about to begin, and with it the annual request to respect, wherever possible, the wildlife which makes its home in the hedgerows. The Viera Marchi and the summer shows are on the horizon, as are a host of opportunities to join activities led by the various sections - we look forward to meeting you on these occasions. Finally, grateful thanks to those who have volunteered to be Reserves wardens, your support is much appreciated!

Felicity Quevâtre-Malcic
President
La Société Guernesiaise



Conservation Herd

This summer marks an exciting new chapter for the Conservation Herd as we welcome two young neutered male Royal Golden Guernsey goats into what has, until now, been an all-steer team. Their arrival opens up powerful new possibilities for habitat restoration across the island.

Unlike cattle, goats are natural browsers. They actively seek out woody plants, thorny scrub and tough vegetation that other grazers avoid. This makes them ideal partners for tackling some of Guernsey's most challenging conservation sites. On the south cliffs, for example, large areas have become dominated by blackthorn. By selectively browsing these dense thickets, goats help reopen the landscape, allowing light back in and giving wildflowers, invertebrates and ground-nesting birds the space they need to thrive.

Scientific studies across the UK show that conservation grazing with mixed species creates a richer, more varied habitat structure than mechanical cutting alone. Goats, in particular, are effective at preventing scrub from overwhelming grasslands and heathlands, supporting a wider range of plants and the wildlife that depends on them.

Working closely with the Golden Guernsey Goat Farm, we expect the two kids to join us later this summer once fully weaned. To support this new project, we will soon be recruiting volunteers - including daily checkers and helpers for moving animals and setting up fencing.

These goats may be small, but their impact on Guernsey's biodiversity will be anything but!

Will Harford-Fox,
Conservation Herd Manager



Reserves

Recent path improvements at the Grande Pré Nature Reserve

The path along the northern side of our Grand Pré Nature Reserve has been very popular since it was established in 1997. A length of wooden boardwalk was installed in 1999 in order to create a short circular route by linking the paths on the north and south boundaries. The boardwalk was subsequently replaced with a raised earth path in 2007 which was safer for visitors and also easier to maintain.

Over recent years, sections of the path had steadily become hazardous due to an uneven surface and broken underground drainage pipes. The teams at Geomarine and CDS learned of these issues when a member of the CDS management team joined a public event hosted by La Société. The two companies kindly donated lengths of new plastic piping which enabled us to reline and replace the broken sections during 2025. Steve Foss and Tim Drewitt of La Société's commercial subsidiary, Environment Guernsey carried out the work. To complete the project, a small digger was then brought in over the winter to cover the pipes and level the rough sections of footpath. The renovated circuit is now a much more enjoyable and relaxing route for visitors as they walk around the nature reserve.

La Société are very grateful to both CDS and Geomarine for their generosity and support.



Tim Drewitt (l) and Steve Foss (r) with one of the donated pipes at Le Grand Pré



A brown crab patiently waiting to be surveyed

Nature Guernsey

Our first Nature Guernsey event of the year took place in early January, and was run in collaboration with other organisations. We teamed up with some brilliant local environmental charities to celebrate World Wetlands Day as we explored the amazing Lihou Ramsar site!

We learnt why wetlands are so important for our planet and took part in efforts to help look after them such as beach cleaning, rock pooling, eelgrass surveying and we led the crab surveying. We had a fantastic morning exploring, discovering, and having fun with fellow nature lovers.

Sarah Allez,
Chairperson, Nature Guernsey

Nature Guernsey organises free family-friendly events, aimed mainly at introducing non-members to the natural history of our island and the work La Société carries out to maintain and safeguard important habitats. Existing La Société members are also welcome to attend these events.

1. *Crabs and Cocks at Cow Bay, Sunday 13th September at 14:30-15:30.*
2. *Bird Watching Day at La Claire Mare Nature Reserve, Sunday 4th October, drop by between 8:00am – 5:00pm*

More events to be added soon! These will be emailed out to all members and posted on our social media platforms and our events page on our website.

Upcoming Nature Guernsey Events:

Juniors walk around Pleinmont



Juniors

Our first junior event of 2026 was a bird walk around Pleinmont led by the Ornithology section. We met at 9:00am and enjoyed a peaceful walk around the La Société fields and cliff paths in the area using our binoculars and ID guides to identify the birds we saw along the route.

In total, we spotted 18 species including Wrens, Whitethroat, Linnet, Chiffchaff, Kestrels, a Gannet and even a Peregrine Falcon passed overhead which was lovely to see. Thanks again to our future generation of bird watchers for coming along and joining us.

If you have a young nature lover, make sure to join La Société and you'll be signed up to our mailing list where you'll be the first to hear about our upcoming events.

If you haven't yet joined us on one of our junior events, we'd love to see you this year. The details of our events are sent out by email to all members of La Société for whom these activities are free of charge.

Upcoming Events:

- Date to be confirmed - Bird Ringing Demonstration at Bordeaux Mound.
- Saturday 10th October, 9:00am –

10:15am, Bird Walk at Pleinmont.

- Saturday 5th December, Eco-friendly Wreath Making Workshops,
Workshop 1 – 10:30 – 11:30;
Workshop 2 – 12:15 – 13:15;
Workshop 3 – 14:00 – 15:00, La Société office, Candie Gardens.

More events will be added, so please keep your eye on our social media pages or check our events page on our website. Events will also be emailed out to all members.

Sarah Allez,
Education Conservation Officer



Our bird walk around Pleinmont for our young Ornithologists.

Archaeology

Earlier in the year we enjoyed two fascinating film plus question and answer evenings with Richard Keen. Amongst his many marine discoveries, Richard found the Roman ship 'Asterix' in 1982. The evenings were very popular and no doubt some people missed out, but hopefully there will be more from Richard later in the year. In March local archaeology graduate Jonathan Charmley gave an excellent talk on the excavations at Cookham Priory, an ongoing research project by the University of Reading. If you missed Jonathan's talk have a look online, where there is plenty of information available including videos. In April the Section visited Le Trépied at Le Catioroc and La Chapelle Dom Hue on the islet nearby. Both sites have seen interesting excavations in recent years and who would imagine that there could be so much history and mystery associated with such a small islet.

At the time of writing we have just returned from a three week dig in Alderney. This year we worked on two different sites: the Paddock Field across the road from the Roman fort (The Nunnery) and also above Longis Common at Whitegates. From previous excavations in the Paddock Field we know that there are remains of Roman buildings here and, not surprisingly, we

recovered quite a bit more Roman material. However unfortunately we also had problems with the water table and were unable to dig as deep as we had hoped to. The most notable discovery from the Paddock Field was a buried standing stone, we were unable to find out whether it had been set up in prehistoric or Roman times (due to water ingress) but it would certainly have been visible in the Roman period. The stone had become buried by windblown sand in the post-Roman period and it could be a prehistoric menhir, but is perhaps more likely to be a marker stone, maybe for a grave. This year we benefitted by having a professional finds specialist with us: going through material found both this year and in previous years, a very significant (and unexpected) amount of Merovingian pottery was identified. This period runs from the end of the Gallo-Roman period until the middle of the eighth century - a time often referred to as the Dark Age because relatively little is known about it. The discovery of such pottery shows that people were still living on Longis Common at that time.

The site up at Whitegates was a new one for us, but graves and a Bronze Age hoard were found in this area in the 19th century. There are plans to build here and we wanted to explore prior to any development.

We quickly discovered that the Germans had been there before us and had to deal with a deep backfilled trench system, but once the position of these buried trenches was established we were able to avoid them and locate undisturbed prehistoric deposits. It is a little early to say for sure, but it appears that this area was cultivated in the Bronze Age and, going by the depth of the deposits, for a considerable period. We recovered pottery, flint, animal bone and several utilised stone tools. In one of our four trenches the prehistoric ground surface could be seen rising gradually (against the natural gradient of the slope) to the modern surface and this had to indicate a, now buried, prehistoric mound. Digging deeper here we uncovered a line of stones crossing our trench which could have been a retaining kerb for the mound. This was beginning to look rather like a prehistoric barrow and we extended the trench as far as we could, but were prevented from going further by a large conifer tree growing just where you might expect the top of the mound to be! If building does go ahead at Whitegates we will now have a very good idea of which areas will need watching.

In mid June the 'NEOSET' team arrive from France and the UK to begin a third season of work looking at Neolithic settlement in Guernsey and Herm. Some of you will have come along to the site visit at Les Fouaillages last autumn and I

also gave a talk on this at our AGM in March. This summer the team will continue their excavations near Les Fouaillages and also on Herm; we are hoping to organise a trip to Herm while the work is in progress. They also plan to explore a couple of new sites in the Vazon area and to take soil core samples in the north and west of Guernsey. The cores will be taken from low-lying areas where there is a greater likelihood of peat deposits; peat preserves ancient pollen and plant remains which can tell us about the past landscape.

In August we are planning a trip to Lihou Priory where Heather Sebire will tell us about the excavations and discoveries there.

Tanya Walls
Archaeology Section Secretary



Standing stone under excavation, note the side of the trench with the thick layer of white windblown sand which had covered the stone (photo by Tanya Walls)



The line of stones in trench three which may be the kerb of a barrow, note the rise in the buried ground surface which reaches its highest point in the left hand corner of the trench and the conifer tree beyond (photo by Tanya Walls)

Zoology

It's well overdue that I properly introduce myself. My name is Leah, and I became section secretary of the zoology section of La Société early last year. Over the last 12 months, I've been learning so much from my fellow secretaries and La Société staff, and I'm very excited to keep expanding on the work I can do to contribute to the Bailiwick's wildlife and biodiversity.

Although I haven't run any public events yet whilst overseeing the section, I've not been idle! You may have already seen me helping out at events run by other sections, like our Nature Guernsey crab surveys and bug hunts, Marine Biology section dolphin and seal surveys, or at Lé Viaër Marchi and West Show stalls.

The main focus for the zoology section at the moment, is a study looking at the population density of feral ferrets (*Mustela furo*) across the island. This study involves the use of camera traps (small, motion activated cameras) which are being set up in groups at specific locations across the island to try to capture photographs of these animals. These ferrets are a non-native species to the island, which means that the ecology of Guernsey is not adapted to their presence, so their effects can be very damaging to the local environment. Ferrets are small carnivorous predators that prey on rabbits, rats, birds and bird eggs (including domestic chickens/ducks), frogs, and other small mammals. The only local natural predators that

might prey on this ferret population are a few species of raptor (buzzards and owls), and they're not easy meals! This means that there is very little to stop the ferret population rapidly increasing in number. We currently know very little about how many ferrets are on Guernsey, so this project aims to help give us an idea of how prevalent they are, and whether they are likely to have a significant impact on our native wildlife.

By virtue of the methods used in this study, we are also getting lots of data about various other small mammals and birds in these areas! The study will be continuing throughout this year, and a write-up will be available once the study is complete.

If you have any questions about the work of the zoology section, or if you have any feral ferret sightings, please contact me at zoology@societe.org.gg

Leah Cottell

Zoology Section Secretary



Camera trap image of a bat flying over the Claire Mare nature reserve – species unverified.



Camera trap image of a feral ferret (*Mustela furo*) running near the lower hide of the Claire Mare.



Camera trap image of a male Eurasian marsh harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) – investigating a dead rat at the Claire Mare nature reserve.

Botany Section

It's been a busy couple of months for the botany section. Spring showcases the majority of our rarest flowers. There were plenty of tiny flowers hiding in the coastal turf on the west coast. The Sand Crocus, in particular, put on a splendid display.

Many people commented on the number of native Bluebells seen. The work that Guernsey Conservation Volunteers are carrying out in the Bluebell wood is paying dividends, with the carpet of white 'Stinking Onions' reducing and a sea of blue appearing. Bluebells were also putting on a beautiful display in many other locations, not least of which was the Millenium walk at the reservoir.

Gareth continued his valuable work monitoring our ferns, quillworts, polypodys and Adder's-tongues. The results of these surveys will be published in the transactions in due course and when meaningful data has been accumulated.

Our camera, especially designed for macro photography, is also paying dividends. It has enabled Gareth to look at minute differences in plant material. For example, the difference

between Least Adder's-tongue and Small Adder's-tongue is both in the spore count and the venation of the leaves. Being able to see, with clarity, these tiny details, enables more accurate identification of plants.

Our public outings continue every first Saturday of the month. However, these are weather dependent and we have not had great luck with that so far. However, botany section members receive news of other outings and, if you haven't already done so, do join our mailing list for notification of other outings.

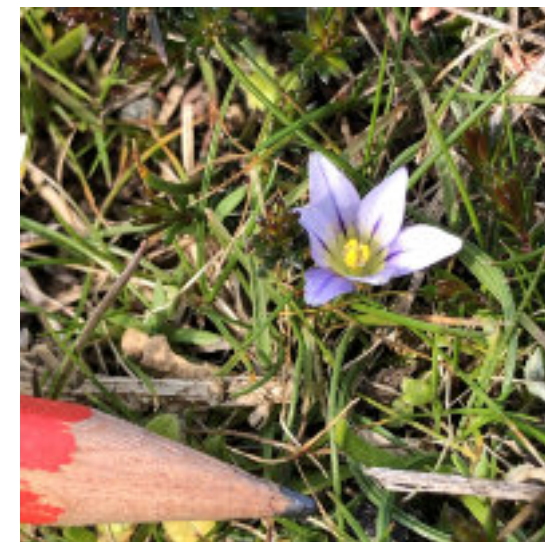
Do, also, keep an eye and follow our facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1310943042297921>

As always, we are keen to survey any sites that have been managed with conservation in mind. Don't hesitate to contact us at botany@societe.org.gg

Helen Litchfield
Section Secretary



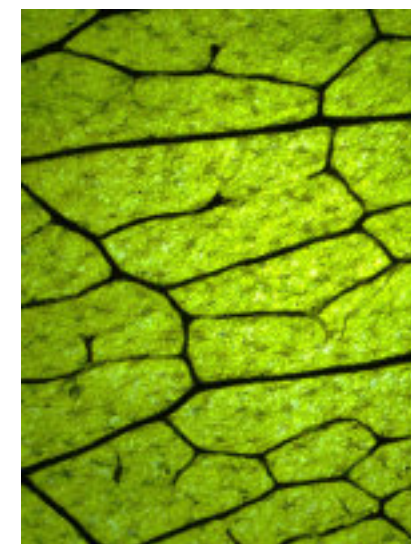
Camera and microscope



Sand Crocus (*Romulea columnae*)



Land Quillwort (*Isoetes histrix*)



Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*)

Entomology Section

We have started the year with lots of plans for the coming months. As I write this, the temperature has been over 30c for two days. The moth trapping has been out of this world with overnight temperatures in the high teens at least, perfect for moths!

On 10th May we ran moth traps at La Marette (Bougourd Orchard) It turned out to be a windy night and not as successful as hoped. We saw a total of 42 species of moth with a Shark being the most interesting record found hiding on the bark of a tree near a moth trap.

We visited La Mare Huchon on 17th May with the sweep nets and Mark brought his beating umbrella along. This turned out to be very useful as a geometrid lava was knocked out of a Hawthorn tree, this seems to be the larva of Brussels Lace.

We were also pleased to see many larva of 13-spot Ladybird and one adult, so great to find this species which is uncommon locally.

The annual Bioblitz was held at Lihou Headland on 18th May so we set several moth traps the night before. Unfortunately conditions were far from ideal with a lot of rain in the night and strong winds but we managed to trap 31 species of moth including a White Colon, we also picked up a few other

moths during the day including Hummingbird Hawk-moth and several Emperor Moth larvae.

Recent trapping for moths has proven very good both in gardens and in the field. I have had two reports of *Euchromius ocella* to garden traps in the last few days as well as a lovely example of Many Lined along with high numbers of some migrant species.

A Striped Hawk-moth visited my garden and another was seen in the cliff trap at Icart with Mark Lawlor on 23 May. Other species that night included an incredible 85 Small Mottled Willow and two *Choristoneura hebenstreitella*, a species not recorded locally since Luff in 1898. This brings us to question whether we have missed it in the past since it is very similar to the closely related *Lozotaenia forsterana*. The morning count was over 500 moths of 73 species.

Membership of the Entomology Section is free for La Société members. Email entomology@societe.org.gg if you would like to join .

Andy Marquis
Entomology Section Secretary



The Shark Moth, Andy Marquis



Choristoneura hebenstreitella, Mark Lawlor

Astronomy Section

The Astronomy Section has had a busy year so far, with weekly meetings, various talks and events, special projects, maintenance, and training for those wishing to learn to use the equipment.

The Section meets at the Observatory from 8pm every Tuesday evening. Updates are sent by email to members, and we often share meeting details on our Facebook page <https://facebook.com/AstronomyGuernsey>.

Non-members are also welcome to attend on Tuesday evenings to see what the Section is about, and join us in observing if clear.

Talks

Robert Roue gave a talk in February on *Voyager : A Lifetime Amongst the Stars*; a retrospective on the two Voyager spacecraft launched in 1977, which allowed us close views of all four of the gas giants in the outer Solar System.

In March, Rob followed up with a second talk, *The Great Zoom: From 1mm to the Edge of Everything* – a fascinating new look at the Cosmological Distance Scale.

A number of members were able to attend astronaut / cosmonaut Helen Sharman's talk for schools entitled "Out of this World". It was a fascinating

talk about the practicalities of putting people into space; Helen's own experiences going to the Mir space station, and the general theme of being prepared and being open to opportunity.

The Ladies College arranged a very interesting evening talk about Exoplanets by Cambridge PhD student Akhil Kumar, which many members attended.

The Astronomy Section held a public talk at Candie Frossard Theatre on 31st March, the night before the Artemis II launch on 1st April 2026. Chris Guerin, Clive Stubbings and Grant Steer produced and led the talk, and a good crowd attended. The talk covered the history of Moon missions such as Apollo, the technology and plans for the current missions, and the goals and activities of the crew. The talk provided an excellent background for those following this mission to send humans back around the Moon - for the first time since 1972. Interesting no doubt for those who followed the Apollo missions – and for those of us young enough to have missed the excitement the first time!

We also held other Tuesday meetings with specific topics or activities; in February, Elaine Mahy led a talk / discussion "Planning a Messier Marathon";

later coordinating the Messier Marathon attempts and in April leading a "Messier Marathon Review" together with Clive Stubbings. In April, Clive Stubbings led an "Artemis Review" evening following the successful mission. In May, Matt Skillett demonstrated how to collimate a Newtonian / Dobsonian telescope.

Several clear Tuesdays were observing evenings / training evenings.

Observing project – Messier Marathon

The 110 Messier objects include brighter galaxies, star clusters and nebulae that may be seen with relatively modest equipment, including a few naked-eye objects. These varied diffuse objects were catalogued by Charles Messier and Pierre Méchain during the late 1700's so they would not be mistaken for comets.

In February through to April, the Section looked at the Messier objects on a number of suitable and less-suitable evenings, including a half-marathon in February between clouds, viewing around 60 of the 110 Messier objects.

A full marathon was held for members of the Section and members of the public on 17-18 March, when 103 of the 110 Messier objects were sighted or photographed between dusk and dawn. Some members equalled this tally again in April with a slightly different selection of 103 objects, from Icart. We were lucky

to have two totally clear nights for this! As part of these attempts, Elaine Mahy captured a sequence of photographs in March over two clear nights, of the 103 March Messier objects found, using the Takahashi telescope at the Observatory and her Sony A7S camera. Each image was a single shot typically of 20 seconds with an appropriate ISO setting. The images were processed and arranged in a large composition to show the relative angular sizes and appearance of the objects, in a rough order of viewing through the night, to aid future observers and to represent the "Messier Marathon Experience".

A selection of Messier Marathon Images by Elaine Mahy

Included here is a collage of 17 of the objects viewed and photographed during the Messier Marathon, showing their apparent relative sizes.

Photo on next page.

For an idea of distances, all the open clusters and nebulae are relatively close by in our own spiral arm of the Milky Way galaxy. The globular clusters are larger, denser and further away, circling the core of our Milky Way galaxy. The galaxies are entirely separate galaxies from our own Milky Way.



A selection of Messier Marathon Images by **Elaine Mahy**

From Left to right going down the image:
M103 open cluster, M76 Little Dumbbell Nebula, M1
Crab Nebula, M78 Casper the Friendly Ghost
Nebula, M108 Surfboard Galaxy,

M46 open cluster with planetary nebula, M101
Pinwheel Galaxy,

M97 Owl Nebula, M3 globular cluster, M104
Sombrero Galaxy, M99 Virgo Cluster Pinwheel
Galaxy,

M29 Cooling Tower Cluster, M14 globular cluster,
M17 Swan Nebula, M4 Crab Globular Cluster,

M20 Trifid Nebula, M6 Butterfly Cluster.

Solar Observing Equipment Update

Moving into summer, we have been fixing up and learning some of the solar observing equipment at the Observatory. Observing the Sun must be done carefully with the correct and safe use of solar filters, or by using safe projection methods.

The heliostat is a long focal length system of mirrors which tracks and focuses an image of the Sun and sunspots to a screen inside the meeting room.

Clive Stubbings has updated the power supply for the heliostat, so that it now tracks again, with assistance from Robert Roue and Matt Skillett. Elaine Mahy has fixed issues with the heliostat setup and positioning, so we can set up with a sharper and more stable image. We look forward to using it for some daytime public events, and to this end

several members have started learning to set it up.

The Lunt 60mm hydrogen alpha solar telescope is new to many of us. With this dedicated solar telescope the red chromosphere of the Sun can be viewed, with prominences and filaments and plenty of detail on the disc of the Sun. This is a great telescope for daytime open events.

The Celestron Mak 102mm telescope uses a front end white light solar filter to view the Sun, and is compact for taking to off-site events.

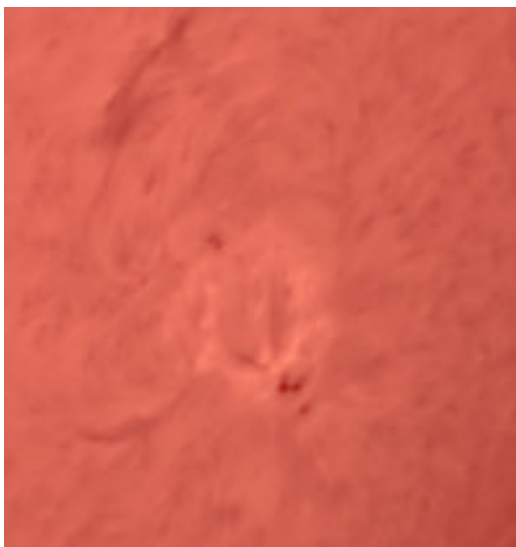
The two large telescopes in the telescope building have their own front-end solar filters available for observing the Sun safely; the Meade has a Thousand Oaks solar film filter giving a yellow-orange image of the Sun, and the Takahashi has a Seymour Solar glass filter which gives lovely crisp slightly yellow views of the Sun and sunspots with different eyepieces / focal lengths. These have been tested in daytime with members invited to view; and in summer, they can also be used in early evening.

There is one further solar filter, for the 8" Celestron telescope.



These two photographs taken at Guernsey Observatory show Sunspot Group 14441 on 22nd May at two different wavelengths, by Elaine Mahy.

In the white image, the photosphere - the visible surface of the Sun, shows considerable detail of sunspots and penumbra around the larger spots, as well as some granulation on the white surface.



In the red image, the chromosphere – the lower atmosphere of the Sun in hydrogen alpha, shows filaments and other atmospheric activity surrounding the sunspot group.

Taken with the Celestron 102SLT Mak and white light solar filter (left image) and the Lunt 60THa telescope (right image), using a ZWO ASI224MC planetary imaging camera. Capture and processing : Firecapture, Autostakkert, darktable.

Maintenance

Now the weather has improved we are starting more maintenance which will continue over the summer. Nick Despres continues to keep the grass mowed and the surrounding area tidy, for which we thank him. Grant Steer has kindly offered to coordinate other maintenance.

Website update

Robert Roue completed reinstating the content management system for the section's website including the astrophotography galleries; restoring the all-sky camera feed; and crucially the Sagittarius newsletter page to allow the 2026 edition to be added. In May, Rob made changes to the style, adding the ability for website visitors to use "dark mode", fitting for us night-owls!

Sagittarius Newsletter

Nick Rowe kindly took on production of our Sagittarius Newsletter this year, including researching all the astronomical events as well as dealing with all contributors. It was quite a job and Nick has done very well with it, with a new look and format. The newsletter, along with past issues is available to read on our website and contains a number of interesting member articles, photos and other features.

Group visits

In February and March we welcomed several groups to the Observatory : 9th St Peters Beavers, Goguetters WI, 4th Forest Air Scout Cubs, and Home Education group. We also made a visit to the St Mary and St Michael Year 5 class at their school.

Several further groups plan to visit the Observatory in the autumn, and enquiries are welcome.

Open Events

To increase the number of volunteers capable of running telescopes at visits and events, we have been concentrating on training which takes time and is weather dependent.

In order to offer for members of the public to view through our telescopes, we do advertise our Tuesday meetings as being open to both members and visitors / potential members, and this has helped bring in some new faces with some interesting discussions. A number of new members have joined the Section. On March 17th we held a Messier Marathon Tuesday, open to members as well as any interested people / potential members, using the large telescopes to view some of the less obvious objects in the night sky. Many people stayed until late evening for the first part of the viewing, taking in many open clusters and galaxies.

We held an impromptu Open Evening on Thursday 23rd April, attracting a steady stream of visitors on a reasonably clear night. The first quarter moon, and planets Jupiter and Venus were visible from sunset, and later various other objects such as double stars, galaxies and star clusters could be seen through the telescopes. A talk on the Solar System was given in the meeting room.

Planned events

On 30 / 31 May we will have a stand at the Big Geekend at Candie, with solar telescopes to view the Sun, and an opportunity for visitors to record and draw sunspots, solar prominences / filaments and other surface detail

In June, we will look for an opportunity to run a Solar Open Day.

We are looking forward to the evening of 12th August, with a 94% partial solar eclipse. With the Sun's low altitude however, a viewing event would need to be held off-site with clear views to the west.

Volunteers

We cannot run group visits and open events without the help of many of our members, and would like to thank the following : Matt Skillett, Clive

Stubbings, Robert Roue, Jill Barnicoat, Nick Rowe, Paul Gavey, Beverly Mason-Barney, Jennifer Webster, Grant Steer, Chris Guerin, and Elaine Mahy.

General Information

For anyone bringing groups to the Observatory by arrangement or visiting on one of our advertised Open events, we generally show visitors how the telescopes operate and offer viewing if clear; and may offer an illustrated talk on a space-related subject.

Donations are welcomed and assist with running and maintenance costs. We suggest adults £2, children £1.

The David Le Conte Astronomical Observatory is in La Rue du Lorier, St Pierre-du-Bois. Perry's Guide reference 21 E3. Parking for group or public events is generally available at La Houquette School, Rue des Paysans. From the school go 100 yards up the road, then left onto Rue du Lorier, then immediately right, behind a large bunker. The road is dark, so a torch is advisable.

For further information about the Astronomy Section see astronomy.org.
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Elaine Mahy
Astronomy Section Secretary

Quasar 3C 273: An Eon-Spanning Observation, by Robert Roue.

On the 12th of May, a moonless night with good conditions, Elaine and I visually observed Quasar 3C 273, the active galactic nucleus of a distant galaxy. The name given to this type of object is a portmanteau of quasi-stellar, or "star-like". Indeed, in the eyepiece, it appeared as a faint star amongst other faint stars. But what is remarkable about this visual observation is how distant the object is. The stars it appears to be amongst are relatively nearby and within our galaxy. The quasar itself is far beyond the Milky Way.

When we look at an object at a distance, due to the finite speed of light, we are looking at it as it was in the past. When we look at the Moon, we are seeing it as it was a little over one second ago. And for the Sun, it's about 8 minutes and 20 seconds ago. Light takes time to travel, and we frequently measure distances outside of our Solar System in light-years. Our nearest stellar neighbour, Proxima Centauri, is 4.2 light-years away, so the light we see now departed the star over four years ago.

The furthest we can see with the unaided eye is the Andromeda Galaxy. If you look in the correct area on a moonless night for much of the year,

you will see a smudge of light from the bright core of this galactic neighbour of ours. It's 2.5 million light-years away. When the light we see today left Andromeda, it was approximately the beginning of the Pleistocene here on Earth.

The evolution of anatomically modern humans took place during the time it took for the light to travel from Andromeda to Earth. And yet, just as the Pleistocene is considered relatively recent geological history, Andromeda is in our galactic backyard.

With the aid of a telescope, we can see further in space and time than Andromeda. Just beyond our Local Group of galaxies is the Virgo Cluster, which is about 50 million light-years away. This corresponds to the Eocene here on Earth. When the light we observe from these galaxies was emitted, ancestors of humans were small tree-dwelling primates called euprimates.

The further away an object is from Earth, the more its light has faded on its journey. So, for very distant objects to still be visible in our eyepiece, they must be intrinsically brighter. Quasar 3C 273 is nearly 2.5 billion light-years away. Objects this distant would ordinarily not be possible for visual observation, but quasars are extremely luminous.

The energy for this light is generated in active galactic nuclei by gas accretion onto a supermassive black hole. 3C 273 is over 4 trillion times more luminous than the Sun at visible wavelengths, meaning it can be seen visually in a relatively modest telescope from across the universe.

To find Quasar 3C 273, we first used a bright foreground binary star system called Porrima, in the constellation of Virgo, around the time it was crossing the meridian. This allowed us to accurately sync the telescope. Porrima was a nice double star in our eyepiece, so we enjoyed observing that before making the short hop to the patch of sky where the quasar would be found. It was tricky to identify at first, but after some comparison to maps we were referring to, and some patience to pick out fainter stars in the same area, we were able to positively identify it.

When the light we saw from Porrima started its journey, I was a child. When the light left the distant Quasar 3C 273, Porrima hadn't even become a star yet, being just a drifting cloud of gas and dust that had yet to undergo gravitational collapse.

Here on Earth, life itself was in its infancy. The light from 3C 273 had

been travelling since the end of the Archean Eon, a time when our planet was only just beginning its 'Great Oxidation Event'. Earth was a world of single-celled prokaryotes.

The complex, nucleated cells that would one day become plants, fungi, and animals—the eukaryotes—had not yet emerged. The light from 3C 273 had been travelling for over a billion years before the earliest plants, simple algae, even existed. And the light had been travelling two billion years before dinosaurs roamed the Earth.

When the first Homo erectus walked the Earth, the light from 3C 273 had already completed 99.9% of its journey, the last 0.1% still amounting to millions of years. In the time it took for that light to cross the void, our Solar System completed ten full circuits around the centre of the Milky Way.

It may have been just a faint star-like object amongst other faint stars in our eyepiece, but I can't help reflecting on its journey compared to the journey of life itself here on Earth over those billions of years.



Best image of bright quasar 3C 273, Hubble (WFPC2). The large-scale visible jet, which measures ~200,000 light-years, was not visible in our eyepiece. Credit: ESA/Hubble & NASA

April 2026 cetacean survey at Jerbourg point, Sarah Allez



Marine Biology Section

Spring season has finally brought about some good long spates of dry days and warmer weather; perfect for getting out and surveying!

During the past few months we have already undertaken a range of activities with BEEP, Seals, Seasearch and Cetaceans, snapshots of which are provided below.

Cetaceans

Our first public cetacean survey ran on the morning of Sunday 26th April – down at Jerbourg point. We were delighted to have so many attendees, including families and visitors. In total we had well over 30 watchers over the course of the 2 hrs. Sadly, no marine mammals popped up during the 2 hr watch, but in classic style subsequent reports indicated that they were present either side (within hours!) of our watch time, just over around the Pea Stacks.

So far this year we have had Bottlenoses, Commons, porpoises and even early sightings of Rissos around our waters. The Rissos sighting mirrors what is occurring within Cornwall and Devon in the UK – where large groups of Rissos dolphins have been staying more frequently in coastal waters than is usual. Early speculations of this behaviour tie it to the glut of Common octopus around; Rissos being a specialist in eating cephalopods including squid and octopus.

In addition to these species, a recent stranding (deceased) along Guernsey's west coast was identified as a Striped dolphin (*Stenella coeruleoalba*). This species shares a similar offshore preference as Common dolphin and shares the characteristic long beak and dark back colouration (though lacking the yellow hourglass on its sides). We have very few sightings of this dolphin in Channel Island records, or in UK

records at all in fact. This may be due to species confusion with IDs (including with strandings) but also will be due to their rarity in coastal locations.

If anyone is interested in getting involved with monitoring work for cetaceans (both regarding surveys, and assistance with strandings work) – we are always keen for more help. Please reach out to DolFin@societe.org.gg

Bottlenose dolphin encounter and amazing , **Chrissie Johns**



Bailiwick Eelgrass Exploration Project

April low tides and good weather provided the first opportunity of 2026 to run an eelgrass survey and walkover for the Bailiwick, focussing on one of our case study sites – Salarie Corner. This is always a very interesting location to review, as initial results indicate that the number of shoots is increasing, and that more of the shore is being populated by *Zostera marina*. Given the strong winter storms earlier on in the year, it will be interesting to see if there has been an impact overall on the eelgrass extent in this region.

As a reminder if anyone has any eelgrass sightings to report (particularly if you swim in the lesser travelled areas of the Bailiwick waters) – please get in touch with Mel Broadhurst Allen, our project coordinator at marine@alderneywildlife.org



BEEP Survey, **Annelotte Baas**

Our first seal survey of the year was also able to take place thanks to the good tides and fair weather in April. Many thanks to the Isle Marine team for helping us with our work and taking us out. It was a lower count than this time last year, but that was largely due to not being able to make it out to the furthest of Herm's Humps (Amfroque), where there are usually a large number of seals hauled out. The weather, while pleasant, was not quite good enough to make it up there without all survey sheets (and individuals on the boat) getting soaked! For this same reason we could not get any photos to add to our ID's during this survey, but hopefully we will be able to get some more footage on our next visit round.

If you would be interested in helping on one of our seal surveys – please get in touch via the marine biology email (marinebiology@societe.org.gg).

On other seal related matters, during this same mid-April survey (19th April) period the St Peter Port harbour was occupied by a grey seal with a well-documented history in UK ports.

The individual (known as Trunk) was seen for 1-2 weeks around the harbour area, around the Fisherman's Quay area of the marina, and was unfortunately fed by a few well meaning fishermen and members of the public. Sue Sayer from the UK Seal research trust was thankfully very informative, and was able to provide a thorough history on the seals activities in the UK, but also to inform on the guidelines for not feeding or getting close with wild marine creatures.

Seasearch

May has been a busy time for Seasearch work, including both courses and Surveys. Many thanks to Charlotte Bolton for Journeying across to Guernsey in mid May, and for running a specialty ID course on crustaceans (16th May) to tie in with the launch of the new

Seasearch ID guide (Marine Crustaceans of Britain and Ireland). The taught session was accompanied by a good rockpooling ramble round Belle Greve bay and using new-found knowledge to ID hermit crabs to species level. Following this week, and to tie in with the Nature Commission Bioblitz, Seasearch volunteers journeyed out on the 18th and 19th May to ID as many intertidal species as possible around the south of Lihou to North L'Eree designated survey area.

Many thanks to all the surveyors and all the volunteers who came out and helped!

Nicky Harris
Marine Biology Section Secretary



29 Seasearch crustaceans course, with very happy attendees ready to go rockpooling, Nicky Harris



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Legacies and donations in lieu of flowers

Members are reminded that it is possible to make La Société a beneficiary of their will. Money or property can be left for general use, or if desired for a specific purpose. They are also reminded that donations in lieu of flowers can be made in memory of members who have died.

Our office at Candie will be open on **Wednesday** and **Saturday** from **10.00 to 13.00**.
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Articles in the newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of La Société
Printed by Colour Monster Printshop Tel: 01481 244175.

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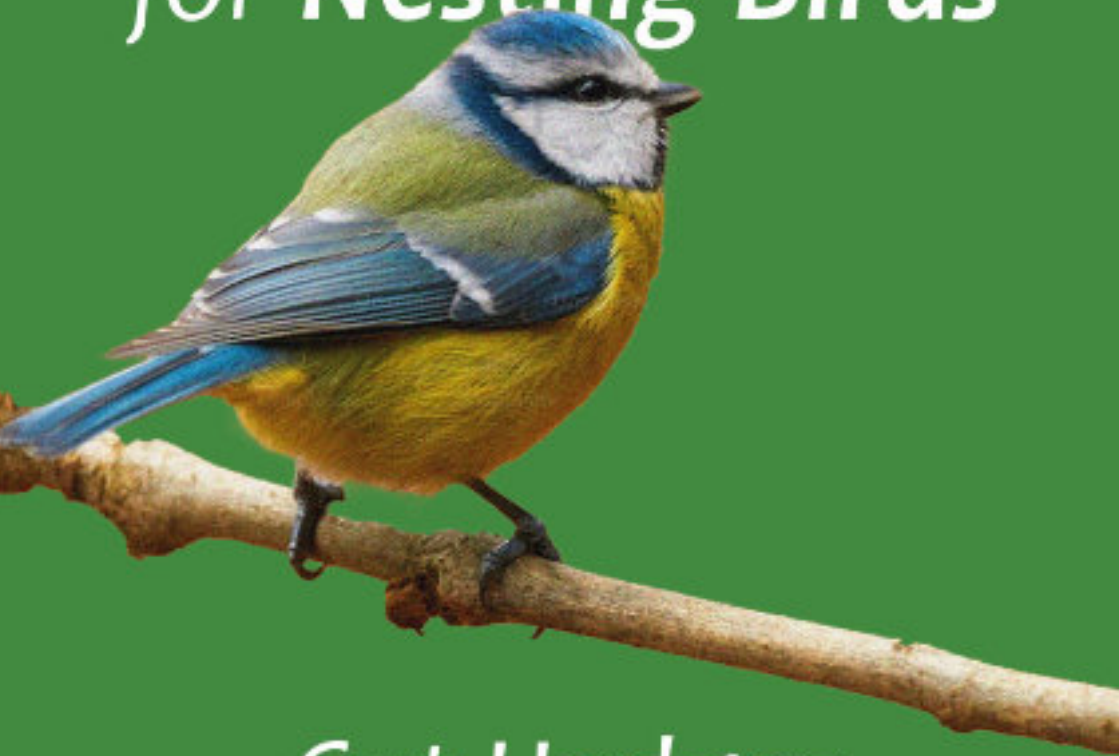
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Critical Time for Nesting Birds



Cut Hedges with Care