

PORCUPINE MARINE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

48th Annual General Meeting

Parliament Hall, St Andrews University

30.03.2025

46 members present

1. Apologies for absence

Council members: Kate Lock, Winter Dotto, Craig Robertson, Beccy Macdonald-Lofts, Julia Nunn

2. Matters arising from 47th AGM held on 24.03.2024 and published in the PMNHS Bulletin Number 22

There were no matters arising and the Minutes were confirmed to be correct.

Proposed: Frances Dipper, Seconded: Iain Dixon

3. Officers' reports

Hon. Treasurer:

A summary of the Porcupine receipts and payments accounts for the year to 31st December 2024 are provided in the accompanying table.

Overall situation – the Society continues to have a healthy bank balance of £22,203, an increase of £2,976 on the previous year. This balance includes £3,025 in bequests & donations which continue to be ring-fenced for specific projects (Betty Green Award £2,425, Shelagh Smith Grant £500, Openshaws £100). An anonymous and unrestricted donation of £150 was received from members with the Society's thanks.

Membership subscriptions – receipts are broadly comparable to 2023 and remain higher than the costs of the Bulletin and other core maintenance costs. It is worth noting that members who join through conference tickets do not usually continue membership the following year.

Bank charges and interest – the Society was charged £15 in foreign transfer fees as the recipient of the Frank Evans Writing Prize did not have a UK bank account. The Society's current account pays no interest but, in November 2023, £10,000 was transferred from the current account into a BoS Fixed Term Deposit at 5.08 % Gross p.a. (variable) with a maturity date of 14th February 2025. The Society earned £509 in interest on this in 2024. The Society has been informed that our current account will incur fees of £4.25 per month from January 2025.

Contributions - contributions of £44 were recorded from historic Standing Orders for lapsed membership subscriptions, a decrease of £15 on the previous year.

Sales - £8 was received for a hard copy Bulletin from a digital-only member.

Bulletin – the costs of printing and postage has decreased as both issues were slightly smaller than the previous year and therefore less expensive to print, bind, courier and post.

Digital services – £57 was paid for the Society's web hosting service and £23 was paid for UK2 email renewal. The Society set up a subscription to Google Workspace in December 2023 and an initial payment of £1.33 was made. This subscription is expected to be £10 per month in 2025.

Public Liability Insurance – the Society is increasingly asked for its Public Liability Insurance (e.g. by St Andrews University) and began a policy with Policy Bee in November 2024. This cost £17 in 2024 and is expected to cost £9 per month in 2025.

Council expenses – £50 was paid for the autumn council meeting room hire. A card reader for the Society's new Square account (associated with Google Workspace) cost £23.

Accountancy fees and Corporation tax – the Society is registered with HMRC for Corporation Tax. Our accountant (LJ Accountancy Services Ltd) stepped down in 2024 and the PMNHS Treasurer attempted to file our return for 2023 but was notified in March 2025 that the return was rejected. This situation has now been rectified and discussions are underway with a new accountant.

Annual conference – the annual conference was held at Bournemouth University. 66 delegates (including 15 new members) attended the conference for one or both days. Registration and Conference Dinner receipts covered the venue, catering and dinner costs with £918 remaining to boost the Society's funds. The book stall raised an additional £515 and the raffle raised £370. A £300 deposit has been paid for the Conference 2025 dinner.

Field meeting – the £200 deposit paid in 2023 towards boat hire for the Alderney 2024 field meeting was recouped from the participants in 2024.

Roger Bamber Research Grant – Elizabeth Beston claimed £406 which included the balance of the grant awarded in 2023 for her Norfolk coast plankton project and an additional £335 to complete the project following rising fuel costs as agreed at the Council Meeting in March 2024. Fliss Fraser claimed her full 2023 grant award of £850 for the Small Isles Snorkel Trail project. As agreed by Council, this was £100 higher than indicated in the 2023 accounts following a misunderstanding regarding the award value. No awards were made for the Roger Bamber Research Grant in 2024.

Frank Evans Writing Award – Lara Baptista was awarded £100 for 'Reconstructing the phylogeny of phidolopodid bryozoans in the North Atlantic' published in Bulletin Number 20, Autumn 2023.

Betty Green Award – one recipient received an award of £75 towards conference attendance in 2024.

Shelagh Smith Grant - £490 was awarded to Fiona Boston and Ingrid Hesling for their project ‘Baselining the Abundance, Age and Size of the population of *Phorcus lineatus* in the Somerset Intertidal Zone.’ It is anticipated that this grant will be claimed in 2025.

Hon. Membership Secretary:

	March 2023	March 2024	March 2025
Full (£18)	194	199	204
Student (£10)	30	26	24
Reduced (£10)	9	13	15
Life members	4	4	5
Free (legal deposit libraries)	8	9	9
Conference		19	17
Total	245	270	274
New since last March 1st	21	27	31
Hard copy Bulletin	157	160	161
Payments:			
PayPal	105	111	115
Standing order	117	116	115
BACS	12	13	13
Invoice		1	1

The table above was presented and Jon responded to a question about the reference to ‘conference’. This indicates the number of members joining as part of their conference fee. The Society decided to make all events members only to avoid the need to pay corporation tax. Therefore a one year membership is included for individuals who are not existing members.

It was also pointed out that with the growing number of payments made by PayPal, the Society does not receive the total amount as PayPal takes a fee. The preference would be to use Standing Orders.

The Membership Secretary is now responsible for sending communications to Members using Mailchimp.

Hon. Editor:

Two Bulletin editions were produced as usual over the last year – Spring and Autumn. They contained 26 articles from 26 contributors. Iain wished to thank everyone who contributed to the success of the Bulletins. First, thank you to the authors, and particular thanks to Teresa Darbyshire for typesetting and her valuable guidance. The

‘army’ of proof-readers checking copy in the background are also very much appreciated. Iain reminded everyone that articles for the Bulletin are always required and all contributions welcome!

Hon. Website Officer:

Vivien reported that a number of changes and developments have taken place over the last year. A Google Workspace account has been opened to facilitate conference planning. Eventbrite was proving expensive and cumbersome so has been replaced with a payable form using Square, which alongside Google forms enables the production of booking forms, payment and reports. This is still a work in progress with the aim of streamlining activities and improving the efficiency of workflow.

The interactive meetings map developed by Jon is now hosted on the website via Google.

There was also some discussion about social media and developing more of a presence. Vicki added that alongside the existing Facebook page with over 1,300 members, an Instagram account has been set up to increase the Society’s reach. Thanks were given to Kate Mortimer Jones for setting this up.

A new Porcupine member, Rob Smith, has expressed an interest in assisting with the technical backend of the website. He will be elected onto the Council as an Ordinary member.

Hon. Records Convenor: (written report by Julia Nunn, read out by Paul in her absence)

The recording scheme remains small, and is principally used for PMNHS field trip records, together with occasional casual records.

Records have been entered from:

- 2024 Porcupine conference fieldwork (March, Dorset)
- 2024 Porcupine field excursion (September, Alderney)

Porcupine funded projects:

- North Norfolk: Elizabeth Beston – final records& corrections received – a total of 1603
- Mollusc Research Project Somerset: Fiona Boston – records received – to be entered onto Marine Recorder online in due course.

I am also pleased to report that I have received casual records from a number of people: Charlotte Cumming (Islay & Northern Ireland): Jon Moore (Tenby): Bonnie Wood (snorkelling, Islay): Keith Alexander (rockpools, Sussex)

The database now holds 97 surveys with 48, 423 taxa records: an addition of 2358 for the year.

I would encourage everyone who has casual records (even common species), or datasets from fieldwork such as student projects to consider sending them to the Porcupine recording scheme. Apps such as iRecord & iNaturalist are ideal for a few casual records with images, but the Porcupine scheme is ideal for longer lists, where supplying images is impractical.

PMNHS has been represented by myself at two virtual meetings of the *Marine Recorder* Working Group during the past year, chaired by JNCC.

The new *Marine Recorder* Online has been under construction since November 2021 when the contract (funded by DEFRA) was awarded to Ocean Ecology. The model is that participating agencies, record centres and groups such as ourselves have separate tenancies within the online structure. It is now in an intensive testing and data migration stage.

The Porcupine database was sent to JNCC in early March for data migration. The database is now being validated – an iterative process between JNCC and myself to remove any errors – before being uploaded to the staging management system.

Hon. Chair:

First of all, I would like to thank all the conference participants for being such enthusiastic members of the Society. The conference is such an exciting and interesting event for all of us, drawing in amateur and professional, specialist and generalist marine biologists across the UK and Ireland.

The Council, as you will have seen from officer reports has covered a wide variety of activities to provide the Society with ongoing publications and events. I would like to thank all of Council, and especially Sarah as Secretary and Fiona as Honorary Treasurer, who have been particularly busy during the change over to Google in managing some of our affairs. Iain has managed to juggle completing another great bulletin with organising the conference. Teresa, Fiona, Craig and Kate have considered the applications for the Roger Bamber Award; Iain, Vicki and Winter have identified the successful winner of the Frank Evans writing award and Beccy, Winter and myself have considered the Betty Green bursary applications.

I would like to thank Kate Mortimer-Jones for her dedication to keeping the social media avenues buzzing during the conference, ably assisted by Vicki and Teresa.

Thank you, Charlotte, for organising the conference dinner last night.

Thank you to St Andrews university for providing the venue for the conference, with support from Professor Claire Peddie and Professor David Paterson and assistance from University staff Andrew Rowley and Maura Petrie.

Council and Porcupine Activities

The Council have had five meetings in total, with 1 Zoom Council meeting, 2 face to face Council meetings including one on Friday night and 2 additional administrative meetings. The additional Zoom meetings have helped us to discuss the organisation of the conference as well as other considerations.

There have been many items for the Council to consider. We have taken forward planning for field trips and the conference, with ongoing updates for the website and administration. You will hear about the outcomes of the Roger Bamber and Frank Evans Awards shortly. Council agreed to fund up to 4 bursaries each year to a value of £250 each, to provide funding assistance to conference delegates, which we were successful in delivering, for this conference.

We have been developing a new way forward, using Google forms to manage membership subscription, conference and other administration. The Porcupine Society now carries Public Liability and Trustee indemnity insurance.

As you will have heard, the team have produced two wonderful bulletins this year.

In the background members of council have pulled together to support the conference in the different elements of the weekend, including raffle, front desk and the quiz.

Last September, numerous Porcupines, along with the Darwin Tree of Life team went to Alderney for a shore and diving field trip, which proved to be an excellent trip. You will find articles in the new edition of the Bulletin.

Future Meetings

We have a great line up for future meetings. Plans are afoot for a field meeting this autumn at Portaferry, Strangford Lough. A great place to visit and to survey, with a wealth of local knowledge. The main conference for 2026 is heading to Haverfordwest in Pembrokeshire, with plenty of choice of field destinations.

Come 2027, we're looking at the 50th anniversary Porcupine conference at Edinburgh museum, so should be a good one.

And finally, I would like to offer special thanks to Sarah and Fiona who are stepping down as Honorary Officers in the Council and hope to continue working closely with them during the period of readjustment of roles.

Grants and Awards

Teresa summarised the current situation. Last year, the Shelagh Smith bequest was awarded to Fiona Boston and Ingrid Hesling for their project on baselining the abundance, age and size of *Phorcus lineatus* in the Somerset Intertidal Zone. The fieldwork is now complete and they have a lot of data to write up and present in future.

It was disappointing that no research grants were awarded for the 2025 fieldwork season. Teresa reminded all present that there is up to £1,000 per grant available and applications are open all year. The next round will close in January 2026. Members were urged to think of projects that might be worthy of consideration.

Iain Dixon then announced the winner of the Frank Evans Writing Prize.

Congratulations to Teresa Darbyshire for her article 'Polychaetes of the Fleet Lagoon, Dorset'. Two other articles were close runners up. These were:

- Peter Barry & David Taylor for their 'Discarded fishing gear aids trans-Atlantic transport of species from the Caribbean to UK shores'
- Katie O'Shaughnessy for 'Novel ecosystems: how intertidal artificial structures may provide unique new habitat for native and non-native species'

Conference poster prize

The winner of this prize was Abhiraj Chakraborty for his work on the genetics of colour morphs of *Actinia equina*. The judges felt that his poster was well explained, clear and easy to follow. A second poster was also commended; the work on the Marine Biodiversity Portal in Northern Ireland around monitoring and observations over time, entitled: 'Some things change, some things stay the same'.

Council Elections

Sarah Bowen is stepping down as Hon. Secretary but wishes to stand as an Ordinary Member of Council with responsibility for conference administration.

Fiona Ware is stepping down as Hon. Treasurer.

Nominations received for:

Kate Lock as Hon. Secretary

Rob Smith as Ordinary Member with responsibility for technical support on IT matters.

There were no nominations for the Hon. Treasurer post.

Voting the new Council members in: Sheilah Openshaw proposed, Bob Earll seconded. Ratified by a show of hands from Members present.

Minutes prepared by:

Sarah Bowen,

Hon Secretary 07.04.2025