

Stalham Farmers' Club – 15th November 2017

At the first meeting of the club's autumn season on Wednesday, November 15, members were asked by the chairman, Jonathan Deane, to stand in memory of John Purling. He had represented the club at a service of thanksgiving at Norwich Cathedral, which had been attended by more than 800 people, to celebrate his life.

In further recognition of Mr Purling's contribution to the club over many years and especially as a committee member, a donation had been made to charities nominated by his family.

A total of 24 members and guest speaker Chris Durdin were welcomed to the Norfolk Mead Hotel, Coltishall.

Apologies had been received from the following – William Donald, president, Sir William Cubitt, Jason Cantrill, John Grier, Simon and Fil Daniels, Sally Lomax, Tim Papworth, Roy Houlden, David Hughes, James Taylor, David Faulkner, Richard Baines, Abigail Collier, Robert Gray.

Correspondence – A letter had been received from the president's daughter, Amanda Sands. She informed the club that her father would like to step down as president.

Mr Deane expressed his sadness but said that Mr Donald would continue to serve as president until the club's annual meeting in February.

Chairman's report – Mr Deane said that the club had held a number of successful activities over the summer months including the annual clay shoot against Holt, although sadly the trophy had been lost to our North Norfolk friends. A memorable farm walk by invitation of Ed Wharton and family had been enjoyed in July, and especially the generous hospitality, by about 40 members.

He said members would be informed by email of future club meetings and activities and he hoped that this trial, instead of sending a programme, would be well received. For a variety of reasons including obtaining speakers, it had been a trying few months for the secretary.

He reported that the work of publishing details and accounts from the club's record books would continue. The secretary had also placed a number of records on the club's website – see Early Years section. Eventually, it was planned to house the original papers in the Norfolk Record Office.

Secretary's report – Michael Pollitt announced that the winter programme of speakers had been finalised and that Dr Lynn Dicks, of the UEA's School of Biological Sciences, would address members on Wednesday, February 14. She had spoken with authority on a recent Radio 4 Farming Today programme.

He apologised for not sending out a programme card but explained that it had been one of the most difficult to find speakers for the winter season.

Further, he said that he would be out of action for most of December while recovery from surgery. In his temporary absence, the chairman would make arrangements for the supper on Wednesday, December 13.

A further plea for grain samples was made – which could be delivered to Adams & Howling or to the Sands Sprayers at Brumstead.

New members – None.

Speaker – Chris Durdin, who had spoken to the club in 2011, as a co-author of the Norfolk Cranes' Story, was a former senior Press officer of the RSPB, then based at the regional office in Norwich. He now also runs Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays and is also a voluntary warden at one of Norfolk's newest nature reserves. The 25-ha (62 acres) Thorpe St Andrew marshes, managed by Norfolk Wildlife Trust on a 10-year lease from the Crown Point estate. It is also halfway through a higher level scheme management agreement, which runs until 2023.

In the past five years, Mr Durdin has run monthly, free, guided walks, and taken almost 800 visitors on a two-hour tour of the reserve. The next will be on Wednesday, December 13 at 10am.

He described the reserve as “a gem” and “pocket-handkerchief” on the edge of the city, which is close to his home in Thorpe St Andrew. It is surprisingly a rich environment for a total of 20 species of dragonflies (11) and damselflies (9), birds (both visiting waterfowl) and even 88 lapwing, songbirds, mammals, including otters, and a range of flora and fauna. A new livestock grazing regime, with five British White cattle, seems to be improving the vegetation.

He took members on a canter through the seasons on the reserve highlighting some unusual visitors including a black-tailed godwit and also a redstart in July this year!

The reserve was also (or has become) a stronghold of the Norfolk hawk dragonfly, which were a regular feature in June and July. Some 53 were recorded on July 7. Orange Tips have also been seen too with an average three-year count of 27 but sadly just eight this year, possibly of the very dry weather in April.

Cetti's Warble has been seen too and on a more regular basis. Birds of prey including buzzard, and feeding marsh harriers and red kite have been observed as well.

He had become increasingly fascinated by ordonata – dragon and damselflies - with an estimated 485 common blue damselflies recorded in 2015. And the seemingly ever-present willow emerald was another distinctive feature.

To round off the evening, he showed a number of photographs from some of the visits to remoter parts of Europe and also Morocco. After many questions and a vote of thanks by Peter Gardiner, the chairman closed the meeting at 9.30pm.