



UNDER 25'S BURSARY REPORT

In partnership with Sheffield Bird Study Group &
Spurn Bird Observatory



PHIL RIDSDALE YOUNG BIRDER'S BURSARY
A report documenting personal experience, positive and negative feedback, and further recommendations.

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1.0 Review of Bursary Terms & Conditions

1.1 Key words/ phrases:

SBSG: Sheffield Bird Study Group

SBO: Spurn Bird Observatory

Migfest: Spurn Migration Festival 2023

1.2 Bursary purpose

This joint venture between SBSG & SBO was launched in the memory of the late Philip Ridsdale – a long standing Sheffield birder and SBSG member, who was also a regular and popular visitor to Spurn.

In recognition of Phil's dedication to sharing his knowledge with others and encouragement of young people in particular, the bursary is aimed at encouraging the next generation of Sheffield birders to develop their interest in local field studies by experiencing the work of a UK bird observatory.

The bursary award is available to any SBSG members between the ages of 18 & 24 who are interested in getting involved in SBSG's activities such as bird recording, species surveys, local conservation or in breaking new ground at local level. In recognition of this, the SBSG Committee will award the bursary to fund a week's stay at SBO. The week's stay will include travel, accommodation, a small allowance for provisions and a donation to the Observatory, and most importantly a chance to experience first-hand the important work carried out by SBO staff & volunteers.



Figure 1: Phil Ridsdale Memorial Bench - SBO Garden

1.2.1 Eligibility criteria

The main conditions attached to the award are as follows:

- The recipient must be aged 18 – 24 (inclusive) and a member of the U25 section of SBSG;
- The recipient will be expected to provide a short testimonial or a presentation at one of the SBSG's indoor meetings summarising their achievements, which they will then write up as a short report for publication in the SBSG e-newsletter. This could be after the study or activity is completed or during its course, in which case SBSG members may be able to contribute thoughts to the study;

- Subject to externally set limitations, SBSG will be allowed to publish or otherwise use the research data from the study.

1.3 Financial breakdown & timescale

The bursary was initially offered to cover 7 nights at the SBO hostel. The chosen timescale for this visit was to coincide with Migfest, with Migfest being during the end of the visit to SBO.

Expenses included:

Expense	Cost
Accommodation (7 nights)	£168
Migfest ticket & donation to SBO	£150 (approx.)
Travel & food expenses (£100 limit)	£80.61
Total	£398.61 (approx.)

2.0 Expenses and Logistics

2.1 Expenses

The maximum amount offered for travel and living expenses was £100. For my week at SBO, I claimed back £80.61. £36 of this was spent on the Sainsburys food shop which was more than enough food to last me the week, covering breakfast, lunches & dinner, with fruit and some snacks. However, due to the social side of the bursary and spending time at the Observatory, recipients may wish to factor in extra money for social events such as impromptu takeaways, trips to the pub and any merchandise, gifts etc from Migfest stalls. The Spurn Ladies also do breakfast & lunches on the Migfest days for a small cash amount.

The financial structure of the bursary went well. I.e SBSG initially paying for accommodation/ Migfest ticket and donation, then allowing the recipient to retain receipts to claim back at a later date. However, consideration of the financial state of the recipient should be given, as someone younger may not have an initial £80 - £100 to then be claimed back.

2.2 Logistics

Reflecting on my personal experience, the bursary logistics was not an issue as I drive and own a car. The route from Sheffield to SBO is easy driving and mainly consist of M roads, followed by travel through multiple small villages.

However, for an U25 that cannot drive or does not have a licence, logistics may prove difficult. After conversation with Rob Hunton, it is recommended that if the bursary recipient does need to take public transport; the effective route would be a train to Hull, then a bus to Patrington. A lift can then be arranged for the recipient from Patrington to SBO.

2.2.1 Considering the food shop

If the bursary recipient is travelling via public transport, they will need to factor in time for a food shop. The nearest shop to Spurn is a significant drive away, therefore the recipient needs to ideally have all their food for the week upon arrival. To do this, the recipient could do a food shop at Hull before getting the bus to Patrington, but this risks cold food defrosting/ warming due to transport time. Alternatively, the recipient gets the bus to Withernsea where there is a Tesco & Aldi, and then gets a lift arranged from Withernsea to the Observatory.

If driving, this obviously makes the process a lot easier. There are multiple shops along the route from Sheffield to Spurn. In my experience, I shopped at the Sainsburys in Hedon which is about 35 mins drive from the Observatory.



Figure 2: Sunset at the Kilnsea Wetlands hide

3.0 Personal and Professional Development

Spending a week at SBO has the potential to progress personal and professional development in a multitude of different ways.

3.1 My experience

In my personal experience as the first recipient of the bursary, the week I spent at SBO was possibly one of the best weeks of my life. On a personal note, the bursary has allowed me to connect with other young birders, and realise that there is a whole community of young birders out there to share experiences with. I am humbled that I have had the opportunity to make, what I hope will be, lifelong friendships with other young birders, and experience time at SBO with them. My week at SBO was the first time I have been able to properly connect with young birders similar to myself, and feel part of a young birdwatching community that SBO proudly hosts. At first it was difficult to be around so many talented birdwatchers who really knew their stuff. As I am relatively new to birdwatching and have a lot to learn, I did experience imposter syndrome in the first few days as I realised I knew a lot less than everyone else. However, once the feeling passed and I became more comfortable with my surroundings, I took my knowledge gap as an opportunity to learn from my fellow peers. Overall, it has inspired and motivated me to improve my birding skills, and really immerse myself into my hobby.

On a professional note, undertaking this bursary has provided me with valuable volunteering experience at a bird observatory, something which will look favourable on my CV. Also, as someone who still has a lot of career paths open, it has enabled me to experience different aspects of conservation and observatory work. For example, I was able to view many ringing demonstrations which has now inspired me to join a ringing group and work towards my permit. The week also provided me with networking opportunities as I made acquaintances with members of BTO & the SBO Committee, providing me with contacts for future career endeavours if needed.

3.2 Other's potential future experience

Overall, considering the elements of my personal and professional development experiences at SBO, it is likely that other potential future recipients for the bursary will also have these opportunities in regards to the social side of SBO & networking.

This bursary will be a fantastic opportunity for the recipient to make valuable connections to others and feel part of a young birders community, something which they may not already have. For someone at the beginning of their career or perhaps still in education, this opportunity will enable them to experience a range of elements of bird observatory work and conservation. It may also inspire them to spend their summers between education volunteering at a bird observatory, like many other young birders from SBO currently do.



Figure 3: Ringing demonstration at MigFest (Meadow Pipit & Reed Bunting)

4.0 Challenges & Obstacles

Challenges identified for the next recipient:

Challenge	Solutions identified
1. Getting around without a car	As Spurn is so remote, and does not boast regular public transport routes, getting to, from and around the area would be an issue as identified in Section 2.2. As a solution, Rob Hunton & Paul Collins have offered to arrange a lift for any future participant arriving on public transport. This would either be from Patrington or Withensea, depending on food shopping needs etc.

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| 2. <i>White male dominated environment</i> | <p>It is widely recognised that birdwatching, as with many things, is very white & male dominated. During my time at Spurn I encountered very few women (apart from the Migfest days), let alone anyone with different ethnic heritage. By no means is this a reflection on the structure, policies & procedures of SBO, but it is something we can all reflect on in terms of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI). I believe this observation should be considered when next promoting the bursary and selecting the next candidate.</p> <p>Solution wise, this is obviously more than a simple fix, and arguably boils down to generational societal structures which will no doubt take a while to change. I have no 'quick fix' solutions for this challenge, but future candidates should be considered based on EDI and more effort should be input into reaching out to these demographics to ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to apply for this bursary.</p> |
| 3. <i>Underlying sexism</i> | <p>Continuing from the previous point, there were some situations I found myself in over the week where there were obvious underlying sexist tones. For example, a statement along the lines of 'why don't you go and help the Spurn ladies?' after trying to make a conversation about birdwatching. Some statements and conversations with members of the public felt very hostile and quite concerning. Women experience sexism throughout their lives, the last place they want to be experiencing it is whilst partaking in their hobbies. The individuals referred to are in no way affiliated with SBO, and I will happily give credit to the lovely gentlemen working for SBO who made me very comfortable and welcomed throughout my stay.</p> |
| 4. <i>Availability of optics</i> | <p>It is likely that the future recipients of this bursary will have binoculars at least, but in the case that they do not have binoculars. It is recommended that SBSG inform SBO of the recipient's optics requirements. SBO can perhaps help out with binocular requirements. SBSG can continue to provide the scope which they provided me with to borrow, or acquire a scope to borrow from an existing member etc.</p> |
| 5. <i>Potential initial imposter syndrome</i> | <p>For a young birder who is perhaps not as skilful or experienced, like myself, there could be an initial wave of imposter syndrome, especially when many other birders speak with such confidence and experience, and have really expensive gear. However, in my case, this soon passed. Ultimately, this will all depend on the type of person who receives the bursary in regards to how they deal with it.</p> |
| 6. <i>Organizational challenges</i> | <p>For the next recipient of the bursary, it might be useful to set an arrival time for them and provide them with Rob Hunton's mobile number in case they get into any difficulty finding SBO etc. This will be especially useful if lifts are to be arranged from neighbouring towns for logistics purposes.</p> |



Figure 4: View from Seawatching Hide

5.0 Future Goals & Plans

Ultimately, it has been agreed between me and Rob Hunton that the Young Birder's Bursary was a huge success, and definitely something both parties wish to progress with for the future.

SBO is keen to work with SBSG to improve and progress this bursary in the future and as an annual event, which would be mostly beneficial to end on Migfest weekend each year.

6.0 Feedback & Recommendations

6.1 General Feedback

Positive feedback	Negative feedback
A thoroughly enjoyable experience and one which I am keen to relive.	Comments highlighted in Section 4.0's table – points 2 & 3.
Everybody at SBO was extremely welcoming and kind – they were always happy to answer any questions I had.	Not long enough!!!
Being added to the WhatsApp groups (i.e. Spurn Bird News/ Spurn common bird news/ Spurn listening dish/ Vols & wardens chat) was extremely useful as it enabled me to remain in contact with other volunteers and get all the recent sightings asap.	
Having a rough itinerary organised for me (although it is understood that things can change due to weather etc.).	
Being given the tide times by Rob Hunton was very useful and something I did not think about beforehand.	

6.2 Recommendations

- Produce a Welcome Pack to send to the recipient before arrival, to include a map of the area, tide times, emergency contact details & itinerary
- Have a briefing before the Migfest set up to prepare the recipients for a sudden increase in people and activity in the area
- Recipients should have an element of independence due to the remoteness of Spurn
- More organised arrival – liaise with SBOT in the lead up to arrival to arrange when and where to meet. If travelling by car, morning arrival is recommended to get settled in and have more time to explore the area. If using public transport, arriving at Patrington around lunchtime would be ideal.



Figure 5: SBOT Kilnsea Wetlands guided walk at MigFest

7.0 Documentation & Reporting

It is recommended that the recipient of the bursary reports back to SBSG annually, and have a follow up meeting with SBOT as a debrief. For future projects, SBOT will provide a specific Risk Assessment for the bursary, rather than using generic SBOT volunteer ones, and to provide this to SBSG prior to the bursary taking place.

8.0 Next Steps & Renewal

SBSG Committee will decide on the next steps for the bursary. After the review meeting, from an SBOT point of view, their feeling is that working with myself to progress the bursary forward to the next stage would be of benefit to the project and to ensure the recipient of the bursary gets the best out of the experience.



Figure 6: Sunflowers at the Listening Dish