



Berkshire Ornithological Club

Minutes of Committee Meeting

held on Thursday 15th January 2015
at Park House, University of Reading

Present: Neil Bucknell (president), Tim Ball (chair), Sally Wearing (Secretary), Bill Nicoll (Treasurer), Iain Oldcorn, Chris Foster, Robin Dryden, Becky Thomas, Richard Stansfield, Renton Righelato (RRi), Ray Reedman (RRe).

1. Apologies for absence: John Walker, Ted Rogers.

2. Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 4th November 2014

Item 9 should have said that the first meeting of the County Recorder/BRC review panel would be held in the New Year, instead of soon after the BOC AGM.

The minutes were approved and signed.

3. Matters Arising

Item 12 (Sale of BofB artwork): Robert Gillmor had recommended the BOC should try to sell the cover artworks for £200 to £250 each. It was decided to sell the two oldest artworks on eBay as planned.

Action: TR to arrange sale of two oldest artworks (Laughing Gull, 2005, and Alpine Swift, 2006/7) on eBay, with reserve price of £200 each.

It was decided to offer the next two (Red Footed Falcons, 2008, and Bluethroat, 2009) to members, asking for sealed bids in excess of £200 each. Adverts to be sent via email, social media, website and in the next newsletter (to make sure we reach people without email), including scans held by Renton.

Action: SW/TR to advertise 2008 and 2009 BofB artworks for sale to members.

4. Formal record of items agreed by email since the last meeting

No items had been agreed by email since the last meeting.

5. Treasurer's Report

The report was circulated prior to this meeting and discussed.

Since the last meeting, BN had reviewed the draft accounts for 2013/14 and had identified what had caused a discrepancy. The accounts were then exactly correct.

The final accounts were circulated prior to this meeting. They were the same as had been provided to members at the AGM, but were presented slightly differently. The date on the accounts should have been 15th January, not 14th, but it was not worth correcting.

BN can provide a full explanation of why the examiner had moved the BofB funds from restricted to unrestricted, if required. BofB funds will be moved across when convenient, i.e. £10,000 in this financial year.

The accounts had not been fully audited, because of the turnover was below £25,000. However, Mike Turton (MT) was waiting to hear from the Charity Commission whether this was acceptable, given the wording in the constitution.

Action: SW to report the Charity Commission's decision to the committee.

The wording in the constitution needs to be reviewed after the 2014 AGM and changed to give more flexibility.

The independent examiner had provided their terms of engagement, which BN said appeared reasonable and which had already been circulated to the executive committee members. It was agreed that they should be accepted.

Action: BN to sign independent examiner's terms of engagement.

Membership Secretary's Report

The report had been circulated prior to the meeting.

About 15 members had not paid and were not expected to now. Overall, about 20 members had been lost over the past year. After climbing for about ten years, membership had been fairly steady for the last two or three years, but had now started to come down.

Some suggestions were made about why the trend had changed (e.g. no Publicity Officer, no public education via classes, etc.). It was agreed that the committee needed to discuss the changes in membership in a structured way, to try to identify how to recruit more people.

Action: IO to provide membership statistics for discussion at the next committee meeting.

Action: All to hold structured discussion at next committee meeting about membership.

IO had contacted the University Ornithological Society about joint membership. After a lot of effort, he had received an acknowledgement but it was then the end of term. He will try again. However, joint membership does not provide a good income for the BOC.

Action: IO to contact UOS about joint membership.

6. Programme Sub-committee report

The report was circulated prior to the meeting and discussed.

The Slimbridge coach was already in profit, with 40 out of 49 seats taken, but it was only viable because of support from other organisations, who had taken about 15 seats. This trip should offset any losses from the bird fair coach, although hopefully that will pay for itself.

The programme for next year had been delayed by RRe's health problem, but was coming together well. Although the University had been notified about room booking even earlier than usual, the University would not do anything about them until internal bookings had been dealt with. However Maiden Place may be available if necessary.

It was decided to offer a ringing demonstration in the outdoor programme, probably on a BBOWT site, in which case it would have to be open to the public as well. If it is in the summer, it would have to be very early in the day.

Action: TB to offer ideas for a ringing demonstration to RRe.

7. Conservation Sub-committee report

RRi gave a verbal report. The most recent committee meeting was on 13.1.15 and, although he had written the minutes, they had not yet been ratified.

Action: RRi to circulate minutes from Conservation Sub-committee meeting.

The main item discussed at the conservation meeting was the designation of new local wildlife sites. About half the county had been reviewed, considering the existing sites and the desirability of establishing new ones. They are recommending three new sites to the Thames Valley Record Centre: the downs from Streatley to Bury Down, Lea Farm gravel pit and Padworth Lane gravel pit. More data is needed for other sites.

The tree sparrow winter feeding project had been established on five sites. No tree sparrows had been seen yet, but most of the sites are not well watched. The possibility of installing cameras was discussed. All sites were private and so should be secure enough.

Shooting is still taking place at the Woolhampton pits, but this is a dual use site. It was reported that BBOWT and the local estate are managing the site well.

8. Editorial Board Report

RRi gave a verbal report at the meeting.

The 2011 report is on its way from Poland and should arrive by 26 January at the latest. It was decided to distribute it in the same way as last time, to minimise the number posted. As many as possible to be handed out at meetings during February (probably at the front desk when members sign in), then volunteers to be organised after that to deliver them.

SW will organise it including establishing and maintaining the list of members. IO will organise labels for any that need to be posted.

Action: SW to organise distributing 2011 report, including establishing list before indoor meeting on 4 February, using membership list provided by IO.

Species account writers will be asked to start on 2012 report. Articles were also required. Aim is a draft report by April/May, so that it can be printed and issued with the August mailing. However, this was mainly sent out electronically in 2014, so the 2012 report will probably be distributed in the same way as the 2011 report.

A new editor is needed, but no-one had volunteered. Some people have offered to contribute so they may be potential editors.

Action: RRi to discuss editor role with contributors.

9. Website Redevelopment

The report was circulated before the meeting and discussed.

The framework of the new website is now complete and the existing content that is up-to-date and relevant has been added. The main outstanding tasks are outlined in the report.

Everyone present approved the job description for the webmaster, including responsibilities for pages. Mike Taylor has agreed to remain as the webmaster, which was also approved by the meeting. The committee formally thanked him for agreeing to continue in this role.

The next stage is for people to update their pages, as soon as they know how to use Wordpress. Anyone who was already familiar with Wordpress could update their pages now.

Action: RRi to hold training sessions, as arranged, for page 'owners'.

Action: All page owners to update the new website.

The process for members joining and renewing online, and changing contact details needs to be defined. A draft form for joining is already on the website. IO requested access to the site to help him in the next stage.

Action: MT to provide access to the new site to IO.

Action: IO and BN to work with MT and RRi to define the process and complete the forms.

A target date for the new site had not yet been set, as it relies on everyone updating their pages. The Atlas section will be added later, after the rest of the site goes live.

Action: SW to ask MT to set a target date for the website to go live, if possible.

IO volunteered to advertise the new website when it goes live, providing someone else can provide some suitable text.

Action: IO to advertise website when goes live, by email.

It was recommended that the website should remain with the current host (Freeola). However, the cost will increase by £2 a month from the current £4.19. Everyone present approved remaining with the current host and the additional cost.

IO asked whether QMR was included and it was confirmed that it is on the County site list, including forms for downloading and posting to him.

10. County Recorder/BRC review

Comments on the role of County Recorder/BRC were being sought and a number of people had already responded. The deadline for responding is the end of January. All responses received so far wanted changes to the current situation.

After the responses have been analysed, the review panel will meet in February to discuss the results. There will be at least two meetings of the panel, which will propose how the role should work. The aim is provide its proposals by the June BOC committee meeting.

Action: TB to report progress to the next BOC committee meeting.

11. Events

Events since last committee meeting

The turnouts at the indoor meeting on 3rd December and the Christmas Social were both disappointing. The format of the Christmas Social was discussed briefly, as the numbers have been slowly reducing, so the format probably needs to be reviewed and possibly revised. The alternatives discussed included: short talks on current topics (e.g. ringing, surveys, local projects); a 'brains trust' with the audience questioning experts; other light-hearted approaches (e.g. 'what is this bird'); holding the event in January; and a different venue (e.g. Maiden Place). There was support for retaining the quiz, but it was suggested that this could be distributed on paper and completed during the event.

It was agreed to discuss this at the next committee meeting.

Action: All to consider ideas for changing the format of the Christmas Social, in order to discuss at the next committee meeting.

Future events

RRi had been contacted by Living Rain Forest (near Newbury) about involving the BOC in their events for National Nest Box Week (14th to 21st February), e.g. static displays, giving talks and/or running workshops. RRe has done this before with other organisations, but the age range of the audience was usually very wide. Although it was short notice, it should be possible to provide at least a display and possibly a few talks.

Action: RRe to follow this up with Living Rain Forest.

12. Reports for consideration:

Social Media Update

The report was circulated prior to this meeting and discussed. Creating events about meetings was a good approach, as it encouraged students to go.

13. Any Other Business

RRe had been given a number of high-quality Basil Ede prints, one of which was framed. Three were of passerines that went well together as a set, plus a non-matching picture of a jay. The meeting discussed the possibility of 'trickling' them out as raffle prizes, but they were better quality than the usual prizes. It was suggested that it might be better to have an 'art event', e.g. a club art auction, to be discussed at the next committee meeting.

Action: RRe to circulate copies of the pictures to the committee and to solicit ideas for an art event.

NB informed the committee that the idea of a joint county web resource was been considered, to include a number of counties in the area that had produced atlases at similar times. This was being discussed by email, with the hope of getting people to take it forward.

14. Date and venue for next meeting

Thursday 26th March at 7.30 pm, Park House, University of Reading.