

Introduction	1
Change of Club Name to Berkshire Ornithological Club.....	2
Annual Photographic Evening.....	2
Upcoming Events	3
60th Anniversary Dinner	3
News from the TABCG.....	3
Black Redstarts in Reading	4
Berkshire Swift & Swallow Survey 2007.....	4
TRIP REPORTS.....	5
ROC Trip to the Isle of Purbeck (Sunday 23rd April 2006).....	5
ROC Trip to Farlington March/Langstone Harbour – November 2006	5
Birding Abroad - Lesvos	6

Introduction

For those who were not able to attend the indoor meeting on 21st March you will want to know that the proposal to change our name to the “Berkshire Ornithological Club” was carried by a good majority (see item below). The details as to how we manage our change of name have yet to be decided, but it is expected that it will coincide with the new membership year which starts this September. By the way, you also missed a very enjoyable Photographic Competition on the same evening - the results of which appear later.

With spring very much upon us, surely thoughts are turning to getting out and doing some real birdwatching, hopefully in pleasant, warm weather. If your birding needs a little more focus, there are a number of surveys that you can get involved in, like the new Swifts & Swallows survey (see later in this newsletter for more details). Or if you like to get up and about early in the morning, how about joining in the search for Black Redstarts in Reading? And, for those who can't get out or prefer their birdwatching to be a bit more relaxed, there is always the ROC Garden Bird Survey, the forms for which are included with this newsletter.

Please note that, where people have provided email addresses to the Club, I will send them an electronic version of the newsletter (in Microsoft Word format), which provides a better quality copy and also saves the Club valuable funds. However, if you would rather receive a printed copy of the newsletter by post please let me know.

All contributions to the newsletter are much appreciated – please get contributions for the Summer edition of the newsletter to me by Friday 22nd June.

Ted Rogers (01344 883237)
8, Ranelagh Crescent
Ascot
SL5 8LW
Email: ted.rogers@theroc.org.uk



Many thanks go to all contributors to this newsletter. Illustrations courtesy of Kingfisher Publications plc.

Change of Club Name to Berkshire Ornithological Club

Following the postal ballot in favour of the Club adopting the name "Berkshire Ornithological Club", members voted formally to amend the constitution on 21st March (for 120; against 24).

The reasons for the change are:

- (i) The great majority of the Club's 330 members live in Berkshire and just over its southern border. The majority (60%) live outside the greater Reading area (*ie* Reading, Earley and Woodley), spread right across the county.
- (ii) The Club has increasingly carried out the role of a county club. For example it maintains the county database, supports the County Recorder, funds and produces the county annual reports and manages the Birds of Berkshire Conservation Fund.
- (iii) The name better reflects the nature of the Club as it has evolved and will enhance its attractiveness to people outside the Reading area, so strengthening membership. It will provide a clear focus for ornithological issues across the Berkshire and would give the Club more influence outside Reading with the media, local authorities *etc.*

Reading, which is towards the geographical centre of the county, will continue to provide the focus for indoor meetings. The Club will continue to work with other bird clubs in the region and hopes to establish a platform for collaboration across the county.

The Committee will be meeting shortly to finalise the details of the change, which it is intended to implement for the 2007/8 season.

Renton Righelato, Secretary

Annual Photographic Evening

This year's photographic competition took place on March 21st and was another successful event, with the judges (and audience) poring over some 100 images, spread across 4 different categories. As always, it was an enjoyable evening with the standard of entry very high and all entrants are to be congratulated on their efforts.

With our two judges - Gordon Langsbury being joined by Dave Cromack (of *Birds Illustrated* magazine) - agreeing (at least most of the time!) winners in each category were eventually chosen, before the audience voted to decide the overall winner.

Winners were as follows:-

Digiscoping Section

Winner: Marek Walford – Black Throated Thrush feeding on berries

Runner Up: David Donn – portrait of perching Stonechat

Action Section:

Winner: Mike McKee – Pallid Swift in flight

Runner Up: Graham Mulrooney – Black-throated Mango in flight

Portrait Section:

Winner: Samantha Timms – Starling on kerbside

Runner Up: Mike McKee – perching Yellow Browed Warbler

Slide Section:

Winner: Mike Smith – Black Headed Gull in flight

Runner Up: Mike Smith – Black Tailed Godwit

Overall Winner:

Mike McKee – Pallid Swift in flight:

All winners received prizes of tokens to spend in the London Camera Exchange shop in Reading, along with a promise of publication in *Birds Illustrated*. Each section winner also received a copy of *The Birdwatchers Yearbook* and the Overall Winner a free subscription to *Birds Illustrated* magazine.

In a very close vote for the overall winner, Mike McKee's brilliant shot of a Pallid Swift in flight narrowly pipped Samantha Timm's lovely picture of an iridescent Starling and so Mike will hold the Gordon Langsbury trophy for the year.

Finally, we add our special thanks to Gordon and Dave for their splendid help in assessing the pictures and helping us all to become better photographers in future!

Note: It is not possible to reproduce any of the winning pictures here, as it would hardly do them justice, but they should be appearing on the Club Web site in due course.

Upcoming Events

Don't forget that there are still a couple of indoor events left on calendar before the summer break.

On Wednesday 4th April, the last meeting in the University will be a talk by Colin Wilson on "The Blackwater Valley and its Birds – Part 2", which will explore the sites downstream from Sandhurst (including Moor Green Lakes). Colin is looking to incorporate birdsong into his talk which should add extra interest, especially for those looking to learn more about this aspect of birdwatching. In this context, please also note that Martin Sell is leading an early morning 'birdsong' walk around Dinton Pastures on **Sunday 6th May** - an ideal opportunity to hear and identify a variety of warblers as well as Nightingales.

On 23rd May, Andrew Cowdell will exhibit and discuss his work as a professional wildlife artist at the Study Centre, Dinton Pastures (from 7.30 to 10.00 pm). Booking is essential – please contact Ray Reedman on 0118 9864338 or email at meander2@hotmail.com

Also, outdoor excursions including mid-week walks will continue throughout the spring period (surely the best time of the year for birdwatching and enjoying the countryside!). Please see the Club programme card or Web site (www.theroc.org.uk) for further details and take the opportunity to meet up with fellow club members and enjoy some excellent walks and trips.

60th Anniversary Dinner

On the evening of March 9th almost 70 members and guests gathered at Caversham Heath Golf Club to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Club. After a very good dinner (and the odd glass of wine) everybody was suitably entertained by a typically witty speech by Jeremy Greenwood (BTO Chairman), followed by some words of thanks to various officers of the Club by Chairman Neil Bucknell. At this stage Robert Gillmor was charged with presenting very well deserved awards to Phil & Carole White, Brian Uttley and Peter Standley for the many and various services they have performed for the Club and to the birds and birdwatching in Berkshire over many years (probably more than they would care to remember!). Then, after a pleasant chat over a cup of coffee, goodnights and farewells were said and the evening came to an end.

I think it is fair to say that it was a very enjoyable social evening, allowing us a chance to celebrate the many successful years of Club, as well as an opportunity to meet up with old friends and fellow Club members. Long may the Club survive to celebrate many anniversaries in the future.

Ted Rogers

PS I still have a few Anniversary coasters for sale (at only £1 each), the money going to Club funds. First come, first served!



News from the TABCG

At Hosehill there will be major work parties on Saturday 7th and 14th April to refurbish the Tern rafts. Any help would be much appreciated, especially if you have battery operated screwdrivers, or any spare nails, bolts etc. Discussions about the proposed new car park at Hosehill are ongoing, with members being asked to write to West Berks Council with their views.

Nest box cleaning has been carried out around the area, in readiness for the new breeding season.

At Moatlands, unless the boat can be fixed in time, it may be difficult to complete the usual island clearance this year, but it is possible that the Waterski club may be able to help and hopefully some clearance work will be possible.

In order to check the results from the Prudential survey it is proposed that a Nightingale survey will take place. To ensure comparability it will need to be carried out between the 7th and 15th of May between midnight and dawn or during the first 5 hours of daylight, listening for singing birds.

The Theale Area Bird Conservation Group always welcomes new members and anybody who can help out at work parties - please contact Brian Uttley for further info. (tel. Work - 01189 783783, Home - 01189 832894). The TABCG also meet on the first Tuesday of every month at the Englefield Social Club, a chance to meet other club members and listen to guest speakers. The Group now has its own Web site, which can be visited at <http://tabcg.mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk>

Information courtesy of TABCG (with thanks to Cathy McEwan)

Black Redstarts in Reading



During 2006 there were only a few records of Black Redstarts in Reading, including one of a juvenile in August and interestingly a pair, for a while at least, at Coley. However, we would like to continue to monitor the status of this bird in our area and early morning surveys provide the best chance of locating birds when they are singing.

This year on 24th March the clocks leapt forward making dawn around 7am, a time just bearable on a Sunday morning! Hopefully birds will be claiming territory at least by this time. The best song I have heard was for a few minutes not at first light but as soon as it could be called full light.

The plan is to do a communal search on two Sundays - April 22nd and May 6th, allowing people to search around any possible areas in the Reading area for a while, before meeting up at the top of Garrard Street car park at 7am (yes am!) to share what's been found. Please join in if you can.

As always any records or info would always be welcome so that I can keep tabs on the general picture. (Please note that records should be supplied to John Lerpiniere **and** to www.berksbirds.co.uk or on a spreadsheet to the ROC in the normal way. Sensitive breeding records will not be published by berksbirds.co.uk or by the ROC)

John Lerpiniere (tel 0118 9426225, email johnle@ntlworld.com)

Berkshire Swift & Swallow Survey 2007

Last year (2006) the Reading Ornithological Club (ROC) in conjunction with Newbury District Ornithological Club (NDOC) promoted a survey of the breeding status of red kites and buzzards in Berkshire. This survey, which was very informal and relied on information submitted by anyone who saw either species, was very successful. As well as providing a better picture of how extensively these two species had colonised the county (where they were rare 25 years ago). The survey involved a community of amateur bird watchers and gave them an opportunity to make a scientifically useful contribution.

Building on this success, the ROC and NDOC are organising a similar activity to look at the breeding status of swifts, swallows and house martins in Berkshire, all of which have shown apparent declines in numbers since the last formal surveys were carried out during 1988 to 1991 as part of the Berkshire Bird Atlas work.

The main aims of the survey are to involve the Berkshire birdwatching community in a simple, useful and enjoyable activity, and to improve our understanding of the distribution and number of breeding swifts, swallows and house martins within Berkshire' I.e. to find out where they breed and in roughly what numbers.

Your participation is needed to help us assess the numbers and whereabouts of these colourful annual visitors in the current year from 15th April – 15th August. By submitting records of all sightings with behaviour and particularly locations of nest sites, you can help us build up a picture of their numbers in the county.

There will be two ways to submit records :-

1. By email, using the record sheet (on the Web site at www.theroc.org.uk)
2. By post, using the Postal Sightings Form, to Berkshire Swift and Swallow Survey, 62 Northcott, Bracknell, RG12 7WS.

It should be emphasised that the organisers prefer you to use Method 1. This makes the gathering and interpreting of data much simpler. ALL reports however, will be gratefully received.

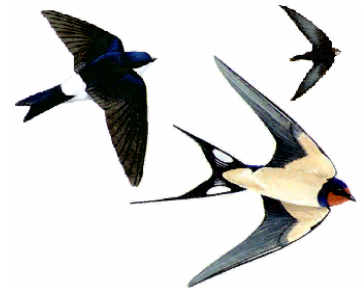
Information must be received by 30th September 2007.

Help with Identification can be found by looking at Identification Notes which includes photographs and descriptions of each of the species.

If you have any queries, please email them to swiftswallow@theroc.org.uk

All contributors will receive a copy of the results either electronically or by post when they become available.

MANY THANKS FOR YOUR HELP



TRIP REPORTS

ROC Trip to the Isle of Purbeck (Sunday 23rd April 2006)

Durlston cliffs are part of an extensive country park just outside Swanage. The area is well provided with paths and has a good mix of habitats, which attract numerous migrants. This trip appeared in the programme as an overnight stay followed by an early start but most of the people who came prefer to make it a day trip, and so it became a day trip. I had not been to the area for about 10 years, so I had intended to do a reconnaissance visit to refresh my memory, but that didn't happen. Consequently, we took a slightly roundabout route from Durlston Country Park car park to the auk colony at Tilly Whin caves. The sea below the cliffs was dotted with birds, which all seemed to be guillemots and shags, but a careful hunt revealed a small number of razorbills. The profile of the cliff path makes it quite difficult to view the nesting ledges so we had to lean out and crane our necks to see under the overhang, where nesting groups of guillemots could just be seen. There were no kittiwakes and fewer auks than 10 years ago but maybe they were still returning from their winter quarters. Out at sea gannets passed regularly in small groups, all going west to east, while a good number of fulmars circled close to the cliffs, where I think they were nesting (but we could not see past the overhang). Inshore movement on the sea included the odd whimbrel and a flock of 20 or so common scoters, all going eastwards.

While we were enjoying the seabirds, a peregrine flew along the cliff face and landed nearby allowing us to see it well before it flew again and drifted off and out of sight. A few minutes later it reappeared coming very fast off the sea in an unsuccessful attempt to surprise a rock dove. This is the only place where (on a previous visit) I have seen a peregrine make a kill, using exactly the same tactic. On that occasion it missed its intended target (a kittiwake) and hit a herring gull, killing it, but then dropping it because it was too heavy.



We spent some time searching for passerine migrants but there were pitifully few. We found one wheatear on the cliff top and heard, but could not see, a lesser whitethroat in the scrub. The best we managed to find were some perfectly dressed male yellowhammers that let us get quite close.

After lunch we travelled the short distance to the RSPB reserve at Arne, near Wareham. The morning's drizzly weather had improved and it had become quite warm, though still overcast. The reserve is organised with two circular walks from the centre, one to the northeast and the other to the southeast. We chose the northeast because it offered more a mix of vegetation than the southeast, which is largely heath. We found a selection of woodland birds, but nothing unusual, plus a few estuary species on the west edge of Poole harbour, of which whimbrel was the most interesting. Back at the car park, one of the group saw a marsh tit that eluded the rest of us but the local lesser spotted woodpecker failed to appear. The best entertainment there came from watching a squirrel take nuts from the bird feeder no more than 3 feet from a tethered collie dog which was clearly not amused by its cheek.

This was a very pleasant day out although didn't turn out as exciting (ornithologically) as I had hoped - it just wasn't a 'migration' day. This is a very scenic and pleasant area, and the mixture of the cliff/scrub at Durlston with the woodland, farmland and marsh at Arne provides a lot to explore. It is an easy journey of about 2 hours from the Reading area and both reserves have good facilities. I do recommend that members who could not come should try this trip, with an overnight stop in Swanage as an option.

Bill Nicoll

ROC Trip to Farlington March/Langstone Harbour – November 2006

On a crisp autumn morning, with the tide an hour or so short of its high point, Farlington Marshes take a bit of beating. With only a few areas of the tidal mud flats still exposed, hundreds of waders were trying to keep their feathers dry, with those unable to find a space retreating to the marsh, especially around the muddy margins of the lagoon. A variety of species were identified among the crowds – Grey Plovers, Dunlin and Redshanks outnumbering the Curlews, Turnstones and Black Tailed Godwits, while a solitary Spotted Redshank was feeding in the deeper water of the lagoon. A Water Rail was spotted on the reed-fringed edge at the back of the pool, followed by another, which ended in a mild skirmish when the two birds came together on the same patch of mud (for apparently quiet and unobtrusive birds Water Rails are surprising aggressive at times!). Meanwhile, out in the harbour, several Red Breasted Mergansers were seen, along with a flotilla of Avocets, looking quite at home in the deeper water.

Our walk took us around a circuit of the marsh, with views of the wheeling flocks of waders out in the harbour, along with the Brent Geese which winter here in good numbers. At the far side we reached an area known as the Deeps, where a small-looking wildfowl sitting among the feeding Wigeon caused us a few problems, being grey plumaged and "duck-sized" it eventually stood up and identified itself as a juvenile Brent Goose (there being no sign of the usual neck collar).

A solitary wader caused further discussion and confusion and led the leader (who shall remain nameless!) to declare his belief that it was a Knot, being devoid of any obvious distinguishing features. No agreement was reached by the group, but, on reflection, the bird was probably a Dunlin (which just goes to show how confusing birds can be, especially when seen in isolation with no other for comparison – well, that’s my excuse anyway!)



A little further on two birds of prey were seen perched up on fence posts. With one happily identified as a Kestrel, the consensus view that the other was a Merlin was confirmed when another bird (more obviously a Merlin in flight) flew into view and the two birds then flew together over the marsh. People who wanted to see one Short Eared Owl were sadly disappointed, but agreed that two Merlins were a fair exchange.

Our circuit of Farlington completed, the group moved around to nearby Hayling Island where lunch was taken in pleasant, warm sunshine overlooking the sea. A walk to the Oyster Beds (a local nature reserve best known for its nesting Little Terns) added a few birds to the list for the day, including Greenshank and Kingfisher. A lovely day ended with the minor frustration of trying (and failing) to positively identify very distant Black Necked Grebes in the harbour.

Ted Rogers

Birding Abroad - Lesvos

Our traditional spring time birdwatching trip took five ROC members to the much vaunted birding island of Lesvos. Taking the first available direct flight of the year from Gatwick we landed safely at Mytilini Airport, where we picked up our nine-seater minibus (an ideal vehicle for up to 6 normal sized people or possibly 9 hobbists).

The drive across the island took us to our rented house in Skala Eressos. Most birding visitors to Lesvos choose Skala Kalloni as their location, with its geographically central location and proximity to some of the best known birdwatching sites. Not being inclined to follow the crowd, we chose Skala Eressos as our base (in the North West part of the island) and, as we seemed to be the only birdwatchers staying in the village, we certainly achieved that objective!

Any concerns that we had about Lesvos being overrated as a birdwatching destination or our choice of location ill advised, were soon dispelled on the first morning, when our pre-breakfast walk took us along the sea front to an area where the small local river enters the sea. The reedy river mouth was teeming with birds, warblers included Olivaceous, Reed, Sedge, Great Reed and Cettis and, upstream, waders included Wood Sandpiper, Little Ringed Plover, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper and Ruff. Among the reeds we found Little Bittern, Purple Heron, Squacco Heron and a diminutive Little Crake, while, overhead, wheeled Red Rumped Swallows, Martins and Alpine Swifts. With other obvious migrants like Golden Oriole, Grey-Headed Wagtail and Spotted Flycatcher it would be fair to say that the week started with a bang! After a pause for a late breakfast (time had rather flown when we had been having fun!) we headed inland into the surrounding hills, where a rough track added other delights like Cretzchmars Bunting, Crag Martin, Sombre Tit, Masked Shrike, Woodchat, Subalpine Warbler, Raven, Long-Legged Buzzard and Lanner Falcon. We finally retraced our steps (thoroughly satisfied) to Skala Eressos for an excellent meal (and a small sampling of local wine - best described as cheap and cheerful).

On day two we stuck with our policy of finding our own birds in the local area and headed off for a morning walk around a local hill known as Sappho’s Mound which gave us our first Lesser Grey Shrike, Bee-eaters and Chukkar. The afternoon was spent in the hills above Eressos mainly in search of the “must see” Cinereous Bunting, which gave themselves away by their simple song delivered from prominent rocks. As we scanned the surrounding mountain side a purple patch of raptor activity provided Short Toed, Bonelli’s and Booted Eagles before we headed back down to the minibus parked at the edge of the village. A movement in the local orchard showed that, at migration time on Lesvos, no bushes or trees should go unchecked, as some careful searching turned up a number of Wood Warblers, an Icterine Warbler and several Spotted Flycatchers and then, a truly stunning male Collared Flycatcher.



The rest of the week was spent visiting the more famous (in birdwatching circles at least) areas around the island. The birding didn’t disappoint, with views of terns (including White Winged Black), Glossy Ibis, Slender Billed Gull, Rufous Bush Chat and Tawny and Red Throated Pipits around the Kalloni Salt Pans; Kruupers Nuthatch and Firecrest at Achladeri; Isabelline Wheatears, Roller and countless Red Backed Shrikes on the way to Sigra; Black Kite at Ipsolou Monastery and numerous Lesser Kestrels near Sigra, to name but a few.

As always, we didn’t see all the species that we would have liked, both Red Footed Falcon and Pratincoles evaded us, not to mention Olive Tree Warbler and Scops Owl (I said not to mention them!). Also, the weather, which had been fine all week, broke on the penultimate day, but we all thoroughly enjoyed our week on this lovely island. Would I say that Lesvos is overrated? I would say definitely not and also don’t believe that Kalloni is the only area worth visiting.

Ted Rogers