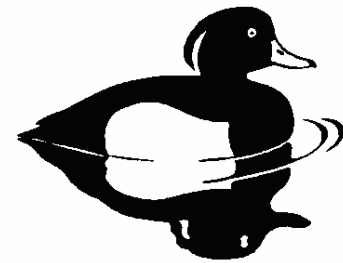


# BOC Newsletter

Summer 2007

No 38



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## Introduction

Welcome to the summer edition of the Club newsletter, somewhat delayed I have to admit, but I was waiting (in vain) for summer to actually arrive! I hope that you are all enjoying the “fine” weather and have had the chance to get out and about birdwatching – presumably on trips abroad!

More significantly, this is the first newsletter under our new name of the Berkshire Ornithological Club (BOC) - after some 60 years in our previous guise we can now look forward to many more successful years under our new banner. The more observant of you may also have noticed that the Tufted Duck logo on the newsletter heading has changed. Over the years, Robert Gillmor has produced innumerable different “tufties” for the Club, resulting in several different versions being used. To coincide with the new Club name one image has been chosen (as shown here), which will be used on all future Club publications and communications.

The next edition of the newsletter will go out with the annual membership mail shot in late August, so any items for inclusion need to be with me in good time (by Monday 13<sup>th</sup> August please).

**Remember also that the Club Web site is available to members for any items of interest to other members – please see “Items for the BOC Website and Newsletter” below for more information.**

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



### **Coach Trip to the Birdfair**

As you can see from the item “The Coming Year” elsewhere in this newsletter, preparations for next year’s calendar of events are nearing completion, but don’t forget that we still have one event left in this year’s calendar – our annual coach trip to the British Birdwatching Fair (Birdfair) at Rutland Water on Saturday August 18<sup>th</sup>. The coach will pick up from Newbury, Reading and Maidenhead and the cost (including entry to the Fair) is £25.

At the time of going to press there were still a few seats left so please contact Ray Reedman (on 0118 9864338 or via email at [meander2@hotmail.com](mailto:meander2@hotmail.com)) as soon as possible for further information, availability and to book your seat.

**It is worth mentioning that, given the weather, the Birdfair site may be a bit muddy, so please wear suitable footwear.**

### **Items for the BOC Website and Newsletter**

Your Committee welcomes and encourages contributions from members for the Club Website and Newsletter. If you would like to offer an article related to birds and nature, especially in Berkshire, or an observation or a trip report from a visit to another country, a reserve in the UK or an area local or distant they will be welcomed. In fact, anything you feel would be interesting to members can be submitted for inclusion, it’s your Club! We are happy to help to edit anything you’re not sure about so all you need to do is send whatever you have to any member of the Committee.

Obviously we have to maintain a degree of control over the content so Ted Rogers is the Newsletter editor who takes the editorial decisions for that and either the Chairman, Neil Bucknell [neil.bucknell@berksoc.org.uk](mailto:neil.bucknell@berksoc.org.uk), or Secretary, Renton Righelato [renton.righelato@berksoc.org.uk](mailto:renton.righelato@berksoc.org.uk) will approve content for the Website which is then promoted to live via Marek Walford our Webmaster.

Your photographs can also be shown on the site in the Website Members area. We have a few galleries at present but welcome more from our many members, some of whom have exhibited their skills before, not least in our annual photographic competition. Send your photos to Colin Wilson at [colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk](mailto:colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk) and he will arrange for them to be shown.

### **Berkshire Swift and Swallow Survey – Reminder**



This is a request to everyone who has been taking part in the survey of swifts, swallows and house martins in Berkshire during 2007. The latest date for recording these species for the purposes of the survey is 15<sup>th</sup> August 2007. The organisers need to have the reports by 30<sup>th</sup> September for analysis if we are to be able to send out the results before the end of 2007. Would all participants please send their completed the online record sheet (the preferred method) by email to [swiftswallow@berksoc.org.uk](mailto:swiftswallow@berksoc.org.uk), or alternatively send postal records to:

Berkshire Swift and Swallow Survey, 62 Northcott, Bracknell, RG12 7WS.

For additional information refer to [http://www.theroc.org.uk/surveys/swallows\\_2007.shtml](http://www.theroc.org.uk/surveys/swallows_2007.shtml)

### **Mid-week Walks – 2006/2007 Season**

Midweek walks had a less successful season this time, owing to mud and flood in January, and the only snow of the winter on February’s chosen date. April’s nightingale walk was extremely well supported except by the nightingales which failed to show up!

We hope for better things next season and here is an early reminder – the first walk on the new programme will be held on **20<sup>th</sup> September at Wildmoor Heath** and led by Bill Nicoll (01344 455403). However you should get your new full programme before that date.

Dot Lincoln

### **Unwanted Bird Books**

Over the next few months, we are planning to have a few more publicity stands at various events to help promote the club and also encourage birding in general.

When organising publicity stands, I usually try to not only advertise the club but also make people aware of the wonderful selection of birds we have here by using photographs to advertise their existence and stimulate an interest. So many people remain out of tune with the feathered residents and visitors that grace our shores.

As an incentive to help enlighten people on birds in the UK and possibly even further afield, I hope to have unwanted bird books available which can be bought for a donation to the club. Hopefully this will encourage people, both young and old, to take a closer look at the birds and the world of bird-watching.

If you have any bird books that are cluttering up cupboards and shelves and that you no longer need, all donations would be really appreciated. To arrange for collection, please contact me on 0118 9894928 or 07730 603393.



Many thanks, Ruth Angus

## **Bird Atlas 2007-11**

Bird Atlas 2007-11 is a huge and exciting project being run by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) that will map the abundance and distribution of birds in Britain and Ireland during the breeding season and winter. It will be fascinating to look at the changes in distribution since the last breeding and wintering atlases. There have been two previous breeding atlases (1968-72 and 1988-91) and just one previous winter atlas (1981-84). Have Buzzards continued to expand? Have Ravens spread eastwards? Have Wood Warblers disappeared from our woodlands? Where do we find Snipe in the winter? Are Siskins in the same places in summer and winter? It's amazing to think that Little Egret was only recorded as a non-breeding visitor in three 10-km squares in the 1988-91 Atlas and now they are breeding in many counties, including Berkshire.

In Berkshire we are taking the opportunity to update our county atlas at the same time as the national atlas work is taking place. Surveying for our last (and only) county atlas occurred at the end of the 1980's and there are likely to have been many changes during the intervening years. Apart from breeding bird distribution, the new county atlas will, for the first time, map wintering bird distribution; map relative abundance across the county; attempt to explain changes in distribution and estimate overall population numbers. In short, an exceptionally important work of reference on the county's ornithology!

Both atlases will include winter distribution and breeding season data and the survey work for these will be spread over four years starting in November 2007. Although the county atlas will be based on tetrads (2km x 2km squares) and the national one on 10km squares, BTO have offered to collect and process all our records to a tetrad level and we therefore intend to use the BTO survey method and tools for both atlases, extending the coverage where necessary to gather the extra information required for the Berkshire atlas. By effectively combining the two surveys we will considerably reduce our data collection and analysis effort.

Berkshire records and offers of help within the county are of particular interest for us but from November we need all your records – whatever you see, whenever it is, wherever you are! There are two components to the fieldwork: **Timed Tetrad Visits (TTVs)** and **Roving Recorders**. TTVs involve two visits in the summer and two in the winter to a tetrad (2 km x 2 km square). Each visit is for a minimum of one hour (although we would prefer two) and the idea is to record species you see and hear along with their numbers, so we can calculate the relative abundance of species in the 2-km squares. Of equal importance are Roving Recorders who make general birdwatching visits to 2km squares where the aim is to compile a species list of everything you see and hear. An important part of a Rover's task is to try to gather evidence of breeding as they go along (three levels – Possible, Probable and Definite).

With over 450 tetrads in Berkshire there is a lot of counting and recording to be done! Whatever your level of birdwatching skill you should be able to contribute something to this project; please get in touch with me if you are able to help in any way. If you have access to the internet, you can find a lot more information about the national atlas at [www.birdatlas.net](http://www.birdatlas.net) which explains the methods and strategy as well as how to stake a claim for a tetrad and submit your data when the time comes!

Chris Robinson

(Berkshire BTO Rep and Berkshire Bird Atlas Group Chairman)

Tel: 01491 671420; Email: [berks\\_bto-rep@btinternet.com](mailto:berks_bto-rep@btinternet.com)

## **The Coming BOC Year**

One of the challenges for the planning teams is to provide a varied programme which will appeal to the wide range of interests and capacities of the members. We think there should be quite a lot for everyone in the forthcoming season. Here is a sneak preview of what will be on offer...

### **Indoor Programme**

Graham Wynne, the Chief Executive of the RSPB, will help us to mark our sixtieth year with a key-note lecture on 7<sup>th</sup> November, to which we have invited other local groups and members of the RSPB. Make sure that date is in your diary!

Otherwise, old friends will mix with a number of new elements. Gordon Langsbury opens the season with a talk on Dutch Birding; David Lingard will tell us about the Italian conservation group, LIPU; and Bob Scott will talk on the hundred years of the magazine, *British Birds*. In the New Year, Mike Mockler will narrate his hundredth trip to Africa; Ken Norris of Reading University returns with the search for Jerdon's Courser in India; his colleague Malcolm Nicholl will later talk on conserving the Mauritius Kestrel; Jeff Blincow will celebrate Flight; Martin Davis of the RSPB will talk about his work as co-organiser of the Rutland Birdfair.

Regular items are there too: the AGM is supported by a presentation of the work for the Berkshire Atlas; the Christmas Social will be serious fun, as ever; a Members' evening will focus on New Zealand and Greece; and a spring workshop will sharpen basic warbler identification for those who feel in need of a skills boost.

### Out and About - Excursions and Mid-week Walks

Outdoors, our aim is to mix some serious birding with some more social outings...

There will be a wide variety of visits to sites that are within a short drive. Many of these will be under the flag of our mid-week walks. These tend to be comfortable, social strolls, which aim to find a wide variety of birds. Others will be weekend events with specific objectives.

There will be two long weekends: one in Cornwall for autumn migrants; and one in Norfolk for late-winter birds.

Longer day trips will include access to the three mini-coach trips run from Bray by the East Berks RSPB (to Pagham, Elmley and Minsmere). Most of our own longer trips are based on car-sharing, though we may sometimes consider booking a coach if there is demand. This year we plan to visit the new RSPB centre at Rainham Marshes; the Hampshire coast, first at Titchfield and then at Farlington; and Kent for winter birds at Sevenoaks and Bedgebury. Spring will see us first at Dungeness (this will possibly be a coach trip), then in the New Forest and, later, in the Forest of Dean. June will take us to Lakenheath RSPB in Suffolk, and on a boat trip to the Dorset nesting cliffs. The season will close with the regular trip to the Birdfair in August.

A lot of back-room work is done to put these plans together and a lot more effort goes into leading each activity. It is all organised for the enjoyment of the members, so please support whatever and whenever you can. It's a good way to meet people, to learn more and to enjoy the world of birds in good company. Details, with key contact names and numbers, will appear on the programme card to be sent out by the start of September.

Meanwhile, please note that the first mini-coach trip with the East Berks RSPB is on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> September (cost £17) and will be to Pagham Harbour. This is always an excellent site. Contact Ernie Allen on 01628 625324 if you wish to book a seat. The first mid-week walk is at Wildmoor Heath on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> September and the first Indoor meeting is the President's Evening on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> September, when Gordon Langsbury will talk on Dutch Birding.

Hope to see you!

### **Local Group News :-**

#### **News from the TABCG**

The Group has now successfully achieved charitable status (as of June 2007), with Registered Charity Number 1119466, although it is not expected that this will greatly affect the day-to-day running of the Group.

At Hosehill the tern rafts have been completely stripped down and refurbished and the gravel cleaned and replaced, with a netting edge being put in place. The Black-headed Gulls deserted the artificial island in early April but then returned and started to build nests (about 3 weeks later than last year). The Terns also returned and again tried to compete with the gulls for nesting space. A new perch has been made near the island to try and encourage the Cormorants away from the rafts and Island. At Moatlands clearance work has been carried out on the island.

The annual Bird Race was successful despite the poor weather, with the winning team (Bruce Archer, Robert Godden and Tim Ball) managing a very creditable count of 104. The total number of species recorded was an excellent 120.

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 has its own Web site, which can be visited at <http://www.freewebs.com/tabcg/>

Information courtesy of TABCG (with thanks to Cathy McEwan)

#### **Moor Green Lakes**

The reserve is going to expand in the future with the area known as Manor Farm already partially prepared as wetland and reedbed. The Moor Green Lakes Group relies on volunteers for many of the tasks they undertake, a friendly group meets on one Sunday and one Tuesday each month from October and March to do a variety of tasks with a broad range of ages and capabilities welcome. Tea, coffee and biscuits are provided although people wanting to stay the whole day often bring a packed lunch to sustain themselves. Timing is usually 10.30 am to about 4pm but often people come for part of the time, say just the morning.

If you are available to help and would like to know more you can contact Colin Wilson for more details on 01252 837411 or email [colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk](mailto:colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk) or email [simon.weeks@mglg.org.uk](mailto:simon.weeks@mglg.org.uk) the organiser. You don't have to commit at all but if you give Simon an email address he can send a reminder of work party dates in advance to prompt your memory.

A 'Taster' day has been arranged for Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> October when from 10.30 to 4pm the group will be at the reserve in the meadow next to Colebrook hide so you can see how human and ordinary they are (!) and ask any questions about the tasks they undertake. Help would be welcome as it is critical to the success of this attractive reserve.

### News from Lavell's Lake LNR (courtesy of Fraser Cottingham)

The replacement 'Tern Hide' is all going well and will be built by the end of July. Friends of Lavell's Lake (FoLL) intends to recommence feeding birds on completion of the hide, a successful activity last year. Most of the original feeders have been destroyed by squirrels so the Group wants to invest about £150 in metal feeders to deter them. It costs FOLL about £500 per winter to keep the feeders full (that tells you how many birds are there!) so do join the group if you want to support them. You can do this very cheaply via their website <http://www.foll.org.uk/> or by picking up a leaflet in a hide at Lavell's Lake or at Dinton Pastures.

Nearby, the new Lea Farm hide is delayed while Environment Agency consent is awaited so it could be July 2008 before FoLL start construction of their first ever 'Members only hide', another very good reason to join the Group. Members can also join a rarities helpline so when something good turns up they are alerted quickly.

Time allowing in the late autumn, FoLL are planning a Bittern awareness day, obviously to promote the importance of Lavell's Lake as a wintering Bittern site. This will hopefully, be an opportunity for people to see a Bittern, the reserve and learn more about FoLL, a volunteer organisation working in partnership with Wokingham District Council.

If you don't know this super little reserve that turns up rarities like few other sites locally, you can find it with its dedicated car park, at SU784728, by turning left onto Sandford Lane one mile north of Dinton Pastures main entrance and entering the car park on the right side. Just like at Moor Green Lakes, always remove valuables from your car and leave nothing on show.

### Trip Reports :-

#### Trip to Portland and Weymouth - April 29<sup>th</sup> 2007



On a clear, mild day, several keener members of the ROC started to arrive at the Portland Bill obelisk from about 7.45, although the official meeting time for the group was 9-30. Their early rising was in vain however, as none of the hoped-for skuas made an appearance. A moderate easterly wind was making it feel cold and also pushing migrant sea birds away from the coast. We watched small parties of Manx shearwaters coming in over the flat calm sea off Chesil beach and then doing a right turn into the Channel as they rounded the Bill where they encountered the wind. However we still got some reasonably close views though they were moving quickly. At one point a peregrine flew past but did not linger. We walked 100 metres west towards pulpit rock from where we found moderate numbers of guillemots, a few razorbill (maybe 6 in total) and best of all 2 puffins sitting on the sea only 200 metres offshore so everyone could see them well. Meanwhile a fair selection of

other common seabirds had been found – fulmars, kittiwakes, sandwich terns, shags and a large number of gannets very close to shore. Shortly before we moved on a flock of 11 waders flew in from the sea. At first it was difficult to see what they were for sure, but after circling over the sea they came right in and landed on the cliffs close to us leaving no one in any doubt that they were whimbrels.

In mid morning we walked up on to the top fields via the east shore, finding several rock pipits along the low cliffs. We went at a very slow pace not least because it had warmed up considerable and we were all still wearing (or carrying) our heavy sea-watching clothes. The fields were full of wheatears – clearly there had been a moderate 'fall' overnight. There were 7 or more on the lower fields and a similar number along the drystone walls in the upper fields plus odd ones elsewhere. In among the group on the top fields we found a whinchat and 2 stonechats. A large raptor passing high overhead, was initially thought to be a buzzard, but turned out on careful inspection to be a migrating female marsh harrier.

At about 1pm we moved on to Lodmoor RSPB reserve, just east of Weymouth. On the way we stopped briefly at Ferrybridge on the causeway linking the Isle of Portland to the mainland where we found a few waders and a flock of little terns. A small subgroup diverted to Radipole reserve to see a garganey that had been reported, and they were successful. We ambled round Lodmoor in the heat and found a variety of waders including both godwits, and a selection of passerines including reed & sedge warblers and a singing lesser whitethroat that showed itself reasonably well. A strangely plumaged dunlin occupied our attention for several minutes but we were unable to turn it into a rarity.

We headed for home shortly before 4 o'clock, taking a short 'leg-stretch' at the Martin Down reserve near Salisbury (a nice downland reserve that is worth exploring) and there we added a few yellowhammers to the list for the day, which totalled 72 species by my reckoning. This was a good day out despite the very late appointment of the leader. We had a pleasant walk in nice weather and we found quite a number of birds you don't see very often. I have never had a bad day's bird watching in the Weymouth area, and although it is quite a long drive it is worth it.

Bill Nicoll

## Trip to Grove Ferry and Stodmarsh – May 13<sup>th</sup> 2007

The forecast had been for a poor day, but I was leading and Mary and I had booked a B and B, so there was every excuse to go! In the event only Bill Nicoll, Ruth Angus and John Hard turned out for our 9.30 rendezvous at Grove Ferry. We did fairly well between showers until we had reached Stodmarsh at about 2.30 p.m. Then the heavens opened and we walked back the three miles or so in torrential rain. It was the worst wetting we had had in years! But before that we had done some quite interesting bird-watching...



When we first arrived on the reserve, there were Swifts all over the area. We soon found the only Turtle Dove of the day. This one was purring bravely between showers and looking rather bedraggled, but it was certainly the one we wanted to find. Reed Warblers and Sedge Warblers were easy enough and we located several, but Cetti's Warblers were more demanding of attention, especially when a pair appeared close up in a bush near first hide. Before we reached that hide, we had lingered a while in light rain at the viewpoint screens, where we were entertained by two close-up male Cuckoos calling over the area for a female. The pool managed to produce just one Redshank and an assortment of ducks, but as we set out towards the Turf Fields Hide, we found a female Wheatear on the path, the only one of the day. Watching from the hide, we had a Kingfisher, a pair of Common Terns and some Swallows over the pool, while a Coot entertained us with its constant collection of nesting material. This was interrupted for a while by confrontation with a Great Crested Grebe, which seemed cat-like in its sudden objection to finding another bird in its hunting area. A great deal of activity by a pair of Reed Warblers was punctuated by the frustratingly-brief visit of a Bearded Tit to the reeds opposite. It was gone in a trice.

At the large central hide we saw little in the pool, but the constant movement of a male Linnet and some Reed Buntings in nearby scrub gave easy viewing. A Kestrel was hunting close to the viewpoint and a male Marsh Harrier was out in front of us: we had several more sightings during the day, including a female down toward the Stodmarsh end after midday.

As we moved across the central meadows into the Stodmarsh reserve, we found a single Meadow Pipit and a pair of Skylarks. From the Marsh Hide we watched Sand Martins, House Martins and Swifts hunting in good numbers, very low over the marsh. One Swift flew so close to the hide window that we heard the hum of its wings.

One bird proved to be a real challenge...Bill spotted a small raptor which settled on a distant fence. For some time we puzzled about it, as it showed some characteristics of a Hobby: it just wasn't smart enough and had two distinct buff-orange patches on the back of the head as it turned. The arrival of a clearly-mature adult on the next post gave us the comparison we needed to be sure that this was just an immature Hobby.

Meanwhile a couple of Little Egrets and a Heron had turned up in front of the hide. Soon a drama unfolded, as the Heron took a very large frog. It looked too large and dark to be a Common or Marsh Frog: it may just have been an American Bullfrog, an escaped species of real concern to the conservation of native species. The prey wouldn't give in easily and struggled for a long time. The Little Egrets moved in closer and a Crow arrived, all hoping for a chance portion! Fifteen minutes later the Heron prevailed. It had been quite a drama!

As we walked the last section into Stodmarsh, Swifts were ever more numerous. There were plenty of Reed Warblers in the reed-bed and a few Cetti's Warblers along the river. The patch of wet woodland was pretty lively too, with plenty of Blackcaps and tits.

None of us had quite anticipated what happened next... A quiet spell in the Reedbed Hide was suddenly attended by a cloudburst, the start of a rainstorm which went on so long that, in the end, we simply had to face a long walk through it. But, in retrospect it was all quite worth doing!

Ray Reedman

## Birdwatching Holidays :-

### Birdwatching in the Pyrenees

ROC members can avail themselves of a 10-20% discount on any bookings (depending on the season) if they make bookings with the family-run Les Sorbiers hotel in Bareges in the French Pyrenees.

Further information is on their Web site at [www.lessorbiers.co.uk](http://www.lessorbiers.co.uk) – an extract of which is reproduced here.

“Our birdlife here in the Pyrenees is much specialised. The area excels in the number and variety of raptors- Bearded Vulture (ten pairs nesting locally), Golden Eagle (found on the mountain-side opposite Les Sorbiers), Booted Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Short-Toed Eagle, Egyptian Vulture, and the ever-present Griffon. The bird most enthusiasts will want to see is the elusive Wallcreeper which during the summer is seldom found below 2000m, our closest site is two hours walk from the village (we observed the birds regularly through to mid-July). The bird otherwise can only be found high on the frontier ridge at over 2500m. We can organise a day to accompany you to our most reliable site. Other species found locally of interest to British birdwatchers are Eagle Owl, Alpine Accentor, Snow Finch, Citril Finch, Capercaillie, Rock Thrush, Firecrest and we have a number of Black Woodpeckers nesting around the village.”

Contact: Rob & Rachel Williamson, Les Sorbiers, 65120 Bareges, France

email: [info@lessorbiers.co.uk](mailto:info@lessorbiers.co.uk)