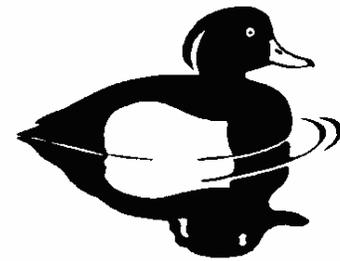


BOC Newsletter

Autumn 2007

No 39



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Introduction

This newsletter comes as part of the Club's annual membership pack, along with various other items. I'm pleased to say that the Birds of Berkshire Annual Report for 2000/01 has been completed in time for inclusion in this mailshot – thanks go to all those people involved in the report, a job which requires considerable effort by a number of people.

Also the Committee has worked hard to put together a varied and interesting calendar of events for the coming year, details being in the 2007/2008 programme card. Hopefully there will be something to interest everyone, whether you are an active birder and more of an armchair birdwatcher. We look forward to seeing you at these future events. As always, any ideas or suggestions for events, indoor or outdoor, would be much appreciated – please talk to any Committee member.

The membership pack also includes the recording sheets for the winter part of the Garden Bird Survey that I hope you will complete, returning your completed forms to me next spring. Hopefully you will have seen the GBS analysis which was published in 2006 (in the 2003 Annual report), but hopefully more analysis will be available soon.

Can I add a further reminder that the regular Club newsletter can be sent via email, rather than via the post, which means you get a better version quicker and it also saves on the Club's costs and effort in packing and posting. Obviously, if you do not have email or simply prefer to receive the Newsletter by post, we will continue to send it that way, but if email would be good for you please let me know via a brief email to my address shown below.

The next newsletter will go out around the start of next year, so any items for inclusion need to be with me by Christmas.

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

From the Membership Secretary

As most of you are aware, our membership year runs from 1st October to 30th September and therefore when you receive this pack, it is time for you to renew your subscription, (unless you are a life member or have joined in the last few weeks.)

Most of you pay up promptly and that is much appreciated. However, for those of you who like to pay in person, I thought I'd better tell you that I have to miss the two September activities, the mid-week walk and the first indoor meeting, as I shall be bird-watching in Trinidad and Tobago (it's a poor excuse, isn't it !) So you'll have to wait until October to pay in person, and then as before it will save queuing if you put the money or cheque and the renewal form in an envelope to hand in. Your name clearly written on the outside is also helpful.

Of course, for those of you who like to post it to me, that's fine. Ken will be here still to collect them together and I'll deal with it all when I get back.

Dot Lincoln

Weekend Trip to Cornwall - 4th to 7th October 2007

This trip is early in the programme so this first reminder may be the last! I will need to make hotel bookings at least 4 weeks ahead of the dates so I need to confirm numbers quickly and hence the latest date for bookings will be 4th September.

The idea is that we will drive leisurely down on Thursday 4th October, with possible diversions for rarities or maybe to Prawle for Cirl Buntings. The next two days will then be birding around the west of Cornwall, looking at the key sites for the rarities that turn up there every year when they overshoot the Scilly Isles. We may try some early morning seawatching and Land's End may provide good chances to see Chough (last year a Merlin also obliged!). On Sunday 7th we will take our time driving back, probably looking in on Marazion or the Hayle estuary.

Car sharing will be encouraged where reasonable, to reduce costs and environmental damage! Costs are hard to estimate without knowing numbers but, I will aim for a maximum of about £40 per night B&B plus whatever you decide to pay for additional food. There will also be petrol costs on top of that. Charges may apply at some sites, such as Land's End but car sharing may help to reduce these.

Please call me as soon as possible to book a place or indicate interest on 01252 837411 or, preferably, by email to :

colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk

Colin Wilson

Getting the Most Out of Your Club Membership

Now that the new programme is available for all to see, it is time to get out the diaries and make notes of our forthcoming events for the year.

How about bringing along family members, friends or workmates to some of our indoor meetings? Sometimes people with only a slight interest in birds might appreciate an interesting and different Wednesday evening out. Visitors and new members are always welcome. We have some great talks lined up including Graham Wynne, Chief Executive of RSPB on 7th November as well as many others. Also, for those members who normally would like to go to indoor meetings but are unable to get there because of not wanting to drive at night or lack of transport, a quick phone call to me on 07730 603393 or to any of the committee members can resolve this. We can put you in touch with someone in your area that would be willing to help. Why miss out? We want all our members to make the most of the programme events we have to offer. Remember, there is also a lift at the University for those who cannot manage the stairs.

The day-trips and mid-week walks make good social outings where you can make new acquaintances and get to share the enjoyment of seeing more birds. Extra pairs of ears and eyes help and experienced birders are always happy to pass on tips on how to recognise bird sounds. This is a big bonus. To know that a bird is about by being familiar with its call is part of adding to your bird totals and as autumn migration begins for the year, who knows what you could be lucky enough to see?

Field trips are useful opportunities to hear interesting and entertaining stories about other member's birding trips to both overseas and UK destinations. This can be a real appetite whetter and useful source of information for those planning their own holidays and excursions. Also, for those wanting to learn more about butterflies, wildflowers and conservation matters there are often members with this additional knowledge to pass on. So much to see and learn on a day's outing! We always encourage car-sharing so please do not be afraid to get in touch with the leader of the trip and ask for lifts.

Enjoy the programme ahead!

Ruth Angus

Trip Report: Nightjar Walk - 20th June 2007



Nightjar walks tend to be a bit 'hit or miss', either the nightjars fly round you 10 feet away or you hardly see them. This walk was somewhere in between. Nine people came along on a cool, clear evening and we walked into the Wishmoor SSSI shortly after 8pm. There we found a good number of specialist heathland species including 10 woodlarks (with close views), 3 singing Dartford warblers and several tree pipits. Stonechats were quite numerous and we also recorded about 20 other common woodland species. As the light grew dim we entered a wooded area and we were soon seeing woodcock and hearing the little 'twizik' calls that they make while roding – during one 5 minute period we saw 5 pass right overhead (maybe 1 bird 5 times?). We returned to the more open heath in twilight at about 10pm and the nightjars began to sing, mostly in short bursts and none very close. There

were probably 4 singing birds in the vicinity. One bird flew to within 50 yards and landed in a tree but it soon flew off and that was our only sighting though we heard them singing most of the time as we walked, in near darkness, back to the cars.

Bill Nicoll

New Tern Hide at Lavell's Lake

BOC members and other birdwatchers visiting Lavell's Lake will be delighted to see the new spacious Tern Hide that became accessible for the first time on Wednesday 8th August.

The original hide, built in 1987 has enabled thousands of birdwatchers to obtain excellent views and take stunning photographs of perching kingfishers, visiting waders including the elusive bittern, water rail and more recently, little egret all of which are becoming regular visitors. During the winter months large numbers of birdwatchers, both individually and in club groups, converging on the area and cramming into Tern Hide had proved that the old hide has outlasted its usefulness. With the current array of optical equipment from small telescopes to cameras with enormous zoom lenses, finding a place to sit and appreciate the birds had become a problem. But all has changed.

As visitors will see, much thought has been given to the layout of the new hide which now accommodates dozens (yes dozens!) of viewers comfortably. The hide measures approximately 15 metres of frontage by 3 metres depth with 11 lower as well as several higher portals facing the open water, Tern Scrape, the island, rafts and extensive reed-bed areas. From within (and with protection from the elements), birders can now watch the comings and goings of birds at the feeding stations through rear-facing portals as well as see activities in the willows and reeds to the sides. There are several free-standing benches and the spacious design allows plenty of room for scopes, camera equipment and back-packs full of sustenance for a good few hours of birdwatching. Plans are in the pipeline for notice-boards to keep visitors up to date with sightings of birds, as well as charts to help with identification.

Visitors will see that this is comparable and even superior to many hides situated at celebrated birding locations in the UK. The official opening date has yet to be decided.

The replacement hide, which was a conglomerate idea involving Friends of Lavells Lake (F.O.L.L.) headed by Fraser Cottington, Dinton Pastures Countryside Parks Department and the contractors, has been financed by the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. It is part of a plan of several years in the making, with extensive works on the reed-beds and provision of pathways, just some of the many achievements leading up to this icing on the cake! To be able to accommodate more folks keen to get a glimpse of a bittern or two, when they are about, this is a gem of a facility and will surely be a valuable mecca that will be constantly utilised in future years.

However, the plan does not end there! There is a Friends of Lavells Lake member's only hide at Lea Farm awaiting final planning permission and the date of construction is hoped to be announced shortly. This goes to prove how exciting the world of birding is becoming around these parts of Berkshire.

In all the excitement, we must not forget the numbers of hours volunteers have put in behind the scenes, to get the waterbeds and scrapes up to the standard so desired by our visiting bitterns, water rails and other waterfowl. The Friends of Lavell's Lake organise work parties on the 4th Sunday of every month and always welcome extra volunteers to lend a hand for a couple of hours on those days. If you can give some time, just come along or phone Fraser Cottington 07855 333616 for information about the tasks in hand. Tea and coffee are provided. Friends of Lavell's Lake guided walks are also held for a couple of hours on the 2nd Sunday of the month, starting at 9am and BOC members are regular visitors to the area throughout the year. If you are unfamiliar with the Lavell's Lake and Lea Farm area, why not call one of the contacts listed on this website under "About the Club" and "Contacts" who will put you in touch with a guide.

In the meantime, on behalf of all BOC members and visiting birdwatchers, I would like to thank all those involved in giving us spacious Tern Hide II - a place where many peaceful and pleasant hours will be wiled away, all-year round and for years to come. Thank you.

Ruth Angus

Parking Charges at Lavell's Lake

Sadly, visitors to Lavell's Lake need to be aware that Wokingham District Council are now demanding £1.00 to park cars at the Lavell's Lake car park. The charges apply from 10am to 4pm every day and tickets must be bought from over the counter at the Golf Course clubhouse opposite. A hefty £80.00 penalty is being imposed on those who do not display a valid ticket. The proceeds are said to be going towards the "management costs" of the Country Park.

Ruth Angus



Berkshire Birding Highlights (2006/2007)

(Courtesy of Marek Walford)

The highlight of **July** 2006 was a very tatty first-summer female Red-footed Falcon at Moor Green Lakes (9th-19th) although its identity wasn't confirmed until 15th. In **August** two Cranes were reported flying low over junction five of the M4 heading towards Datchet (7th) but they were never seen again. An immature male Goshawk flew low south-west over Greenham Common (15th). In **September** a dark morph juvenile Long-tailed Skua was at Queen Mother Reservoir (9th-17th). The long stay provided many local birders the opportunity to add the species to their county lists after having been disappointed by the short stay of the August 2003 bird. Enterprising sailors were offering "pelagics" at £5 per person, rising to £10 per person by the end of the birds stay! A Great White Egret was seen flying south down Church Road, Newbury (11th). A juvenile Honey Buzzard flew north-east over Moatlands GP (15th). A Manx Shearwater was found by a non-birder in a shop doorway on Kings Road, Reading (19th). It was taken to the Child Beale Trust but sadly died on the 21st. In **October** a Hoopoe was in private gardens at Englefield (3rd). Two dark phase Honey Buzzards flew over the A4 at Maidenhead Thicket (9th). In **November** a female Ring-necked Duck was at Moor Green Lakes (19th). Queen Mother Reservoir hit a purple patch in **December** beginning with a juvenile Great Northern Diver (1st) that remained till 31st March, followed by a Leach's Petrel (7th) and a Red-throated Diver, a first-winter Glaucous Gull and a Purple Sandpiper (all 26th). The escaped drake Ferruginous Duck was seen at Dorney Wetlands (10th) and was still present in late May. What was presumably the long-staying escaped White-fronted Goose was at Woolhampton GP (28th and 31st). **January** 2007 started with a Bean Goose at Remenham (2nd-8th). In **February** the only Waxwing of the winter was seen by one person at Swinley Forest (21st). In **March** an Avocet was at Woolhampton GP (22nd). In **April** a juvenile Icleand Gull was at Queen Mother Reservoir (1st). A female Ring-necked Duck was at Dorney Wetlands/Slough SF (17th-26th). An Avocet was at Moor Green Lakes (20th). In **May** there was a run of Spoonbill records starting with one at Dorney Wetlands (4th), followed by two at Lea Farm GP (14th), three mostly in flight at Dorney Wetlands (16th) and two flying south over the twin bridges roundabout at Bracknell (17th). A Glossy Ibis was reported flying east over the B3270 towards Winnersh (6th) but was never seen again. A Cattle Egret (the first record for Berkshire) was seen by one lucky observer flying north over Lea Farm GP (21st). An Arctic Skua was reported flying north over Queen Mother Reservoir (27th). In **June** a female Goshawk was seen soaring over the M4 near Great Shefford (12th).

(Note: This report only includes Berkshire rarities reported during the period July 2006 and July 2007. It is of news interest only. Records have not been verified or subjected to scrutiny by the Berkshire Records Committee).

Book Review: "A Thames Bestiary" by Peter Hay and Geoff Sawers

When club member John Froy recently offered me a copy of "A Thames Bestiary" for review, I was intrigued, but busy, and set it to one side for a week or two. As it sat on my desk I found its simplicity intriguing and began to dip into a little treasure house of observation, wit and whimsy that gradually took hold of me.

I think that we are all, first and foremost, attracted to the glimpses, flashes and mystery of nature: the rationality and science come later. This is a collection that reflects the light of the simple pleasures in the natural world; re-connects us with the magic of childhood; celebrates the beauty that so many miss or ignore in the urbanised world of techno-babble and consumer-speak. Yet it is mischievous and witty too.

Not that you must expect too much colour in the presentation: this is a modest little volume with an Arts and Crafts feel about it. But the colour is there in the words: the kingfisher is "an instant of combustion"; pigeons' wings "sheet white against a thundercloud". Not that it is all post-Romantic stuff, since "urban starlings form a pseudo-ferrous matrix". There are endless surprises in store.

Anecdotes, tall stories and legend mix happily with the word-play and lyricism. Where does legend stop and the lie begin? Where is the truth that under-pins the poetry of folklore? There is no boundary-line here and we can be gullible. History is evoked, legend cited, and your leg is pulled. Beware! It's serious stuff, but it's witty and fun too, even weird at times! Just take a few moments to absorb "Adder"! One line from "Hare" sums it all up for me, since, we are told: "the hare keeps the earth flat by virtue of his own velocity".

That line really tugs at memories of my East Anglian childhood. I have no fears that the local theme will limit the universality of the appeal of this delightful collection. Try it for yourself.

Ray Reedman

"A Thames Bestiary", by Peter Hay and Geoff Saunders. Price £7. Two Rivers Press, c/o RISC 35-39 London Street, Reading (tel 0118 9871452). Web site: www.tworiverspress.com

