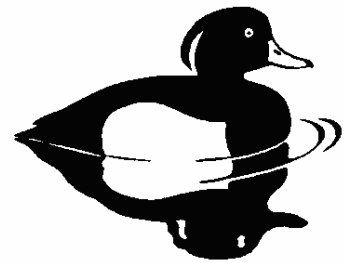


BOC Newsletter

Summer 2008

No 42



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Introduction

This year's belated summer edition of the newsletter comes to you as part of the Club's annual membership pack, along with other assorted items of interest. If all goes to plan the Annual Report for 2004 will have come back from the printers in time and will also be included here. I'm sure you will join with me in thanking everyone involved in the production of these reports – a significant task which takes a lot of people a lot of time to complete.

You'll be pleased to know that the Committee has also been busy putting together a fine calendar of indoor and outdoor events for the new season, the details of which are in the enclosed membership card. I hope you will be able to attend a good number of these events. As always, any feedback, ideas or suggestions for events, indoor or outdoor, would be much appreciated – please talk to any Committee member.

The mail-shot also includes the recording sheets for the Winter Garden Bird Survey - I hope you will take part and return your completed forms to me. I know that we have not published any recent analysis of these records, but be assured that the records remain important and we are trying to find a way of incorporating them with other Berkshire garden bird data to give a better picture of how our local birds are faring across the county. “Watch this space”, as they say.

The next newsletter will be the autumn edition, going out later this year – please send me any items for inclusion by the middle of October.

Ted Rogers (01344 883237)
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Many thanks go to all contributors to this newsletter. Illustrations courtesy of Kingfisher Publications plc.

A Note from Carole White

As most of you will know, Phil has Huntington's Disease, an incurable neurological illness. Sadly earlier this year his condition deteriorated and it became necessary for him to go into care.

If anyone would like to send him a postcard from their travels I'm sure he would be delighted.

His address is :-

Room 4, Abbotts Barton Home, 40 Worthy Road, Abbotts Barton, Winchester SO23 7HB

I would like to thank everyone for the help and support they have given to us in recent years, especially at the anniversary dinner last year. Phil was so thrilled with our award.

Also, I am collecting used postage stamps for the Huntington's Disease Association (HDA) so any contributions would be gratefully received.

Carole White

Queen Mother Reservoir

The Club hopes soon to be able to offer an exciting new birdwatching benefit to its members: exclusive access to the whole of the rim of Queen Mother Reservoir. QMR is the largest area of open water in Berkshire and has a long record of turning up interesting waders, gulls, wintering ducks, grebes and divers and storm wrecked seabirds. Many visitors will have been frustrated by the very limited access that has been available in the past and is shortly to be withdrawn.

Thames Water is discussing a license to the Club to issue permits and keys for the rim pathway to members only. They also plan to make available a room inside the gates for record logs and refreshments. We need a few volunteers who are interested in visiting the QMR fairly frequently and would be willing to undertake some simple monitoring and administration duties (one of which is "twitch" control!). If you are interested do please contact me.

Renton Righelato

Email: renton.righelato@berksoc.org.uk

Telephone 0787 981 2564

Don't let your guard down! Kennet Valley Park is not dead yet!

Although the Government has helped us by rejecting the Kennet Valley Park proposal by Prudential don't assume the battle is over! The South East Plan (the plan that defines the housing allocations for many years to come) is only now at the consultation stage. This means that there is an opportunity for alternative proposals to be submitted before matters are settled.

We need our members to continue to help in keeping the proposals and any like them off the agenda for these valuable wildlife areas. In the first place we need to look at the nature reserve status of the area and then how we might use the consultation period to strengthen the case against development. A meeting is taking place to consider the next steps to maintain the stronger position we have established against development at Burghfield. Once this has taken place and a new strategy agreed we will communicate further with advice on action to take. The parties supporting the objections include BBOWT, the Environment Agency, Friends of the Earth and the Kennet Valley Preservation Association alongside BOC.

Many members helped us achieve the removal of the KVP proposals from the draft plan and we appreciate their help. Please continue to keep your interest in this issue and support us when the next steps are agreed. For further information please contact Colin Wilson on 01252 837411 or Mobile 07899 066687 or colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk

Supporters of Birds of Berkshire Annual Reports

The Annual Reports we produce are getting more expensive and our aim is to at least maintain the quality and colour reproduction in future. To enable us to do this we rely on sponsorship and each Report contains advertisements for businesses good enough to support us. These supporters also have their details on our website www.berksoc.org.uk.

Please have a look at the advertisers and see if they can help you, whether it is a birding trip to Norfolk, having your carpets cleaned, landscaping your garden, feeding birds in the garden or, of course, buying binoculars or cameras there are services available. London Camera Exchange also support our photographic competition and offer members a discount on purchases so make sure you call there if you need something and always mention the Club so you get your discount offer.

Swifts in Trouble – Help Needed



The BTO's Breeding Bird Survey reports a 26% decline for Common Swift in the UK between 1994 and 2006, although for many regions the reported decline is much higher - 42% in the South West, - 53% in the South East, for example. If the locations of the breeding sites are not established they cannot be protected against destruction or obstruction during unsympathetic renovation or rebuilding.

The UK-SWIFTS PROJECT has been set up to identify breeding locations and work to stop the decline of this charismatic icon of summer. You can join the project to register your support, and if you know the location of a Swift colony, report it. Many Club members will have witnessed the low level screaming displays round their homes that indicate the presence of a Swift nest site in the immediate vicinity.

Observations may be submitted via the UK-SWIFTS Project discussion forum <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/uk-swifts/>; or by email to uk.swifts@yahoo.co.uk, or by voicemail to 07831 247089; or by SMS text message to 07831 247089. The data stored is Date, Time, Latitude & Longitude, which can be submitted as Ordnance Survey coordinates if preferred, Street-name, Town, County, Number of birds, First-name, Last-name & Comments e.g. "Site lost – demolished", etc.

The project coordinator is Geoff Beale, 4 Bay Close, Three Legged Cross, Dorset, BH21 6SW

BOC Photographic Competition 2009

This is a good time to remind members of the popular photographic competition which has grown in recent years and, with the added expertise of Dave Cromack makes the evening one of the highlights of our calendar. With the winning shots being published in Birds Illustrated for the past two years this is a competition with an added attraction for all you photographers out there!

Now the breeding season is over and migration is starting again new opportunities will arise for interesting bird photography. So, don't forget to take your camera when you go birding and we look forward to an even greater entry to the competition next year. There is still plenty of time to take photographs, the closing entry date has still to be set and will not be until February next year. Good luck and remember, recent winners have been quite common birds so even garden bird photographs stand a chance!

If you need any information or have questions about the competition ask Colin Wilson at any meeting or call him on 01252 837411 or email colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk

Editor's Note: And if more incentive is needed, it is worth knowing that the winning picture from the 2008 competition (Bill Watts' stunning picture of a Grey Heron) received the additional accolade of appearing on the cover of a subsequent edition of Birds Illustrated. The small reproduction here does not do his picture any justice !

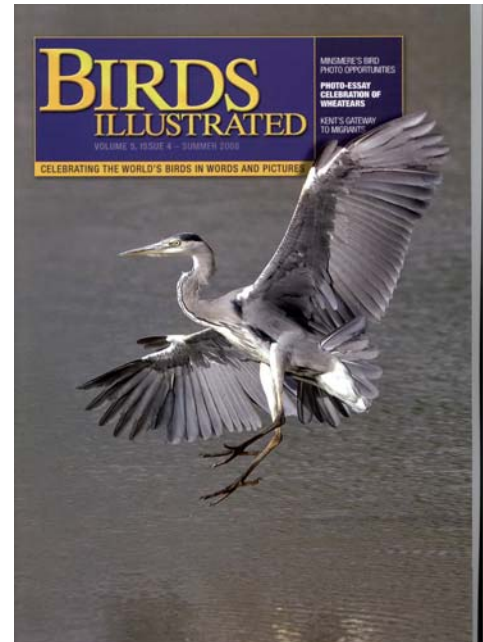
Birdwatching Week at Caerlaverock

Would you like to spend a winter week birdwatching around the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust Reserve at Caerlaverock, Dumfriesshire, Scotland, staying on-site at Eastpark Farm from 29th December 2008 to 5th January 2009?

Flocks of Barnacle geese, whooper swans, duck and raptors can be seen close to the farmhouse. Visits to Loch Ken for pink footed geese, red kite and to Loch Ryan at Stranraer for divers, scaup will be made.

This will be a 7 day trip based at the WWT Centre at Caerlaverock. The Farmhouse is warm and we will be self catering while we are there. There is limited accommodation for 10 people dependent upon sharing. The cost is approximately £120-£150 depending upon the numbers.

If interested please contact: Carol Winder
Tel. 01753 854393
Email: winder_carol@hotmail.com



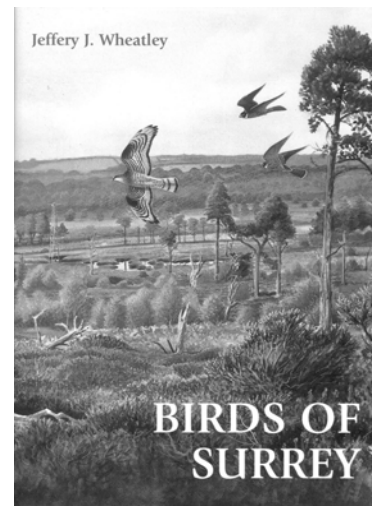
Book Review – “Birds of Surrey”

This wonderful book has just been published by Surrey Bird Club. It was a long time coming (I paid last September) and I had almost given up on it when it finally arrived just before Christmas! And I must say, it would have made a great present!

There are just under 700 pages packed with information about birds found in Surrey. It is a complete avifauna and a testament to the knowledge and skills of Jeff Wheatley, County Recorder since 1983. Apart from being filled with facts about birds, habitats and birding sites in Surrey, the colour illustrations by John Davis give the book a distinctive, instantly attractive and homely appeal especially to someone like me who lives so close to Surrey's superb heathlands.

The systematic list is encyclopedic and has such fascinating information as the only record of Golden Eagle in the county and the very readable story of Buzzard which has now firmly returned to the county as a breeding species. Ringing recoveries are also covered such as the Turtle Dove ringed at Thorpe as an adult in 1976 and found 1118 km south west, eight years later. A good section is devoted to the history of Ring-necked Parakeet, very much a Surrey bird and now very common in much of the County with some spectacular roost sites.

If you like birds and live in or near Surrey I recommend this book, at a cost of £35 it is not cheap but it is so packed with information it will keep you dipping in for much time to come! Available from Surrey Bird Club <http://www.sbclub.ukonline.co.uk/> or ask the Newsletter Editor for details.



Birdwatching Tour to South West Bulgaria and Greece

From 5th-16th May 2009, with leader: Bulgarian Ornithologist Ljubomir Profirov

This 12 day visit to Bulgaria in May 2009 will be in the south west of the country staying for 3 nights in Melnik. The area is famous for its red wine! The area has some wonderful scenery with high mountain ranges and of course wonderful birds, flowers and butterflies too. It will include a visit to the famous Rila Monastery, the Kresna Gorge area and a two day visit to Lake Kerkini which is in Greece and a short journey from Melnik. There will also be a short time on our arrival to see some of the important places in the centre of Sofia.

The tour will include a visit to Trigrad Gorge, famous for wallcreepers. On our return journey we will visit the Pazardejik region along the Vucha River Gorge for raptors and other birds such as blue rock thrush, crag martin, calandra lark, stone curlew. Finally we will visit two areas of marshland, Aldomirovtzi and Draganman to see glossy ibis, ferruginous duck, bittern. Accommodation will be in small private hotels and in Trigrad we will be staying in a good private guest house. Cost will be £1000.

The tour is organised by The British Bulgarian Friendship Society which aims to introduce British visitors to those special places in Bulgaria as well as meeting Bulgarians. A donation is given to a Bulgarian Conservation Organisation for each booking received by The British Bulgarian Friendship Society.

If interested please contact Carol Winder
Tel:No. 01753 854393
email: winder_carol@hotmail.com

News from the TABCG

At Hosehill Lake the sand martins have returned to the wall and some 17 holes have been occupied. With some holes having been enlarged, it will be interesting to see which holes have been used at the end of the season. Other good news from the site includes a kestrel with four chicks (which were ringed before fledging). Although not yet confirmed, it looks like Great Tit numbers are up on last year whilst Blue Tits are down. Sadly the common tern eggs got washed away in the heavy rains. Elsewhere, at Burnthouse Lane, three pairs of Little Ringed Plovers have nested., thanks to Hadleys (the operators on the site), agreeing to protect the area with tapes and bunds.

This year's Berkshire Birdrace had 12 teams competing. For the first time two teams tied for first place with 112 species. The winning teams were Fraser Cottingham, Adam Bassett and Andy Johnson and Marek Walford, Mike McKee and Paul Bright-Thomas. There were a total of 122 species seen on the day and one new species (Short-eared Owl) added to the list.

For those people who were around at the time, it is amazing to realize that the Theale Group is now celebrating its 20th year! Appropriate events are being organized including a **20th Anniversary Barbecue** on Sunday 17th August at The Falcon in Theale High Street from 12.30 onwards. The event will be open to the public so all are welcome to come along and learn more about the Group.

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)

Trip Reports :-

Field Trip to the New Forest and Pennington Marshes – Sunday 18th May

A small group of us met at Acres Down car park on a beautiful sunny morning, having had quite an eventful journey down by the country lanes, seeing plenty of rabbits, a couple of hares, and having hit a roe deer a glancing blow on the rear. I checked for dents, but there were none and the deer had disappeared, so I assumed that it was not badly damaged. Bill Nicoll hit a deer even harder on his way down and had to retire due to a leaky radiator (we discovered later).

We walked down into the beech woods and soon found a Wood Warbler singing and displaying in a glade, with another one or two in the vicinity. Nearby we watched a pair of Redstarts at their nest-hole in an old beech that had probably been hit by lightening. On the way back to the car park, a Firecrest was spotted foraging along the edge of the track.



On the raptor viewpoint on the hillside our luck continued to hold – a Honey Buzzard was spotted almost immediately as it flew behind the group at close range, and then a Goshawk proceeded to perform some display manoeuvres in front of us. A pair of Ravens, once a very rare bird so far east, was seen briefly, along with plenty of Buzzards in the air. Three Woodlarks and a Tree Pipit put in an appearance, and a Crossbill flew over calling, but no-one picked it up in flight. We had also had distant views of a Hobby, so the raptors had done us proud.

Midday in the Forest tends to be a quiet time, so we set off to the coast – Pennington marshes to be precise – where we were also not to be disappointed. After seeing several other birders rushing around fairly purposefully, I suspected that something interesting was in the offing and so it proved, but more of that later.

There were a few Lapwings on the marsh, a Whitethroat or two singing and the usual Little Egrets, but nothing like the winter spectacle of masses of ducks, geese and waders, although we did see about 150 Black-tailed Godwits resplendent in their full orange summer plumage. On the Solent there were a number of Eiders, two of which were adult males in full summer plumage, and a strange duck that puzzled us all for a while. After considerable debate, my initial diagnosis proved to be correct, and was confirmed by other birders – it was a female Velvet Scoter. It was then joined on the water by one of the female Eiders for comparison!

A walk round to the further lagoons proved very worthwhile and the mystery of the wandering birders was solved. There in the marsh, appearing from time to time among the tussocks, was a Glossy Ibis! Not only that, but there was also a Ruff in full summer plumage of orange and black and two Little Stints – always hard to see on spring passage, in their full adult plumage. Several Whimbrels flew by at close range, calling, and, as the tide receded, plenty of Dunlin were seen with some Grey Plover, and probable Sanderling, which even telescopes could not pick them out with certainty. Nevertheless a superb day with excellent birds – all we could have hoped for, and more!

Martin Sell

Trip to Lakenheath RSPB – Sunday 1st June 2008

The main reason for this trip was to find golden orioles, which breed in the woods on the reserve. We chose the 1st of June for this excursion, which (we now know) is probably not the best date. We found out that the orioles are at their most visible in Mid May, when they are singing, and in mid June, when they are feeding young, but in early June they are incubating and are hard to find. Nine members made the fairly long journey to Cambridgeshire on a quite cool, grey June morning – more like April, though it warmed up a little later. However, this was good bird watching weather and plenty of song birds were singing.



Lakenheath is a big reserve (long and thin) so we spent most of the day there, walking round slowly. There are no hides (yet?) so fortunately it did not rain. We called in briefly at the well equipped new reserve centre before taking the path through the reedbeds past three fair sized woods of mature poplar trees (a legacy of the match making industry) where some of the group heard golden orioles singing. As you would expect there were plenty of sedge and reed warblers and a few blackcaps and garden warblers in the woods. A nightingale sang in a thicket near the river but I don't think anyone saw it. Bearded tits were around but they generally kept down in the reeds though a few were seen, but kingfishers zipped past several times and most people saw them. From the observation point in the middle of the marsh we could hear a bittern booming in the distance but, though we scanned the reed tops for some time no one saw one fly, but our disappointment was tempered by the discovery of some (possibly three) common cranes

in the middle distance which were well seen by everyone through telescopes.

On the way back we searched the riverside pools for garganey (without success) but we did watch a hobby hunting over the reeds and a barn owl (at about 3pm) hunting along the bunds quite close to us on the other side of the river.

On our way home we called in at an area of Breckland heath close to Lakenheath where we located 2 pairs of curlews and a stone curlew taking our list for the day past 50 species.

Bill Nicoll

Obituary – Dr Derrick Foskett, 18 August 1914 - 30 November 2007

Many of the older members of the ROC(now BOC) will have known Derrick Foskett as a keen birdwatcher and club member for over 40 years. He was a pleasant gentleman with a hint of military bearing, but few of us were aware of his extraordinary exploits during his military service as an Army Medical Officer during the Second World War 1939-45.

After surviving a very near miss during the London Blitz, he was sent on Atlantic convoy duty from England to Freetown, Sierra Leone. Out of 34 ships, 22 were sunk by enemy action. Subsequently he was engaged in active combat in North Africa where he was taken prisoner in June 1942 after walking alone through the desert for 10 days, almost dying of thirst and inadvertently walking through a minefield. Transported to Italy, he escaped from the POW camp and journeyed on foot along the Appennines for the next five months towards the advancing Allies. He was captured a second time and transported to a German POW camp where he suffered terrible hardships. After being transferred around several POW camps, the final camp was abandoned as the Germans quickly retreated in front of the Russian advance. From here he made a dash for freedom and home to England. While a POW he put his medical skills to great use, working and living in appalling conditions.

It is remarkable that he emerged from this horrific part of his life to be one of the most considerate gentlemen I have ever met, without a hint of resentment or emotional scars.

I came to know Derrick long after these events, in July 1966 when we went on a cruise round the Scottish Islands organised by the Scottish Ornithological Club. Later we presented a joint lecture on our trip to an ROC Members Evening. His interest in birds and bird watching was deep rooted. His skill and knowledge were developed in the Yorkshire Dales where he grew up. It was many years later we began to go out birding together. We shared some memorable occasions such as a trip to Cornwall to see a magnificent white Gyrfalcon fly by at eye level then perch on the cliff below us. This was followed by male Greater and Lesser Scaup side by side on Drift Reservoir, rounded off with a female King Eider resting on a rock just 20 yards away, near St Michael's Mount. I nearly spoiled the day on the return journey when pulled over for speeding. Fortunately the police officer was somewhat bemused by our birdwatching exploits and sent us on our way with a verbal caution.

The depth of Derrick's interest in birds is illustrated in quite a different event in Norfolk in our quest to obtain a satisfactory view of Arctic Redpoll. At New Costessy we saw pale birds with white undertail coverts but with some difficulty looking up into the alder trees. Not being absolutely convinced with the identity we decided to try another site at Langham. At Langham we had the unique experience of being able to sit on the tailboard of my car while telescoping Redpolls at very close quarters as they fed on groundsel seedheads and consulting the identification literature I had brought with me. We had Lesser, Mealy and Arctic Redpoll in the same field of view simultaneously. Finally, Derrick turned to me and said "Now at last I have definitely seen an Arctic Redpoll". This shows Derrick's breadth and depth of birdwatching and I will always appreciate the fact that I was able to share his companionship and expert knowledge of birds.

He remained active up to the last few years of his long life and he will be sorely missed.

Gordon Wilson (ROC/BOC Member from 1966)