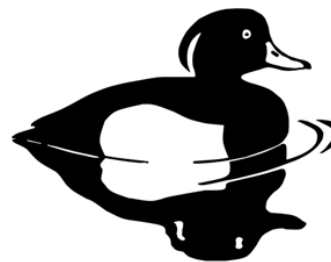


BOC Newsletter

Spring 2011

No 53



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Introduction

Welcome to the spring edition of the Club Newsletter, coinciding with some lovely spring weather, although, as any gardener will tell you, “we could really do with some rain!” While it may not be good for the garden, it certainly makes birdwatching much more pleasant! I hope you are all enjoying it.

For those who receive their newsletter by post, I have included a copy of the Club’s Summer Garden Bird Survey form. I know it is a little late going out, but I hope that you will still be able to take part (an electronic version having already been sent out to all of you for whom we have an email address, but please let me know if you have not received a copy of the form and would like to take part). You will probably know that this is the last year of the Bird Atlas, so this is our last chance to record breeding evidence for your garden birds on the GBS form. The extra column entitled “Breeding Code” allows you to enter the relevant code. The form provides a list of codes to be used, so do please try to help.

While our indoor programme has finished for this season, the field trip programme continues, with a number of weekend and mid-week walks over the next few months. **Please note that the date for the Nightjar Walk at Padworth has changed to 9th June** (all other details are unchanged). See the later item in this newsletter for details or check your programme card. Don’t forget that we also have our regular coach trip to Birdfair at Rutland on Saturday 20th August – Ray Reedman would be pleased to reserve you a seat.

As always, all contributions to the newsletter are much appreciated – please get contributions for the Summer edition of the newsletter to me by Friday 22nd July. Bird illustrations courtesy of Kingfisher Publications plc.

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



BOC Garden Party

Looking at the BOC programme, there seemed to be a bit of a lacuna in July, so we thought it would be a good time to have a Garden Party. The party will be at 63 Hamilton Road, Reading, RG1 5RA, on Sunday 3rd July, from 3 pm to 7 pm. All members, their partners and children are invited. As for the Christmas Social, please bring some food or drink to share.

To give us an idea of numbers, RSVP: Pat & Renton by email to renton.righelato@berksoc.org.uk; or to 63 Hamilton Road, Reading, RG1 5RA.

Editor’s note: For those of you who, like me, now feel the need to reach for the dictionary, a “lacuna” basically means a gap. It’s from the Latin, and interestingly (or possibly not?) the word lagoon comes from the same origin.

Membership Secretary

Dot Lincoln, who has been our Membership Secretary for some 15 years, has this year retired from the role. One of the mainstays of the Club, she has worked tirelessly to encourage new members and make sure that all members are properly looked after – and pay their dues! She has been instrumental in the doubling in the BOC's membership over the last decade. The BOC owes her a lot and we will be thanking her formally at the next AGM. Dot has handed the baton to Heidi Bailey, who will be working as part of the new Membership Services team led by Colin Wilson.

Renton Righelato

Treasurer's Note

My thanks to those who buy raffle tickets at indoor meetings, and to those who give prizes. Income this season has been £338, £40 of which was directed to FOLL. The Dilger meeting produced a profit of £205, thanks to sponsorship from Kowa and London Camera Exchange, those who bought raffle tickets and 50+ visitors who paid £252 to attend. The raffle ticket sales were below our expectation and we learnt the lesson that only those who attend meetings are likely to buy tickets. There was no response to my offer in a Newsletter to send tickets to those members who were not to attend the meeting. It was pleasing that the first two prizes were won by members.



Dot Lincoln and I have got our queries about non-payment and reduced payment of subscriptions down to single figures. Some members promise to pay but don't, and others we have been unable to contact. The extra work created in clearing these queries has been more than a nuisance and for now we have abandoned our attempts to clarify the remaining queries. I have no wish to hear a third promise to pay, but will issue a reminder later in the year.

Our subscription income will pass £5000 this year and Club finances currently show an excess of income. However, the production of a Report would reduce this excess, and our capital. Your Committee's aim is to ensure that our annual income covers the running of the Club and the production of a Report. This year's Accounts may clarify if we continue to meet that aim as a Report may be available before the year end. Gift Aid tax refunds are a major help to our finances and I expect to claim in excess of £1000 this year. This income becomes more important as our interest income is now in the low tens of pounds. Have you Gift Aided your subscription? Ask me if you are in doubt.

John Roberts (0118 9482137)

Volunteers

The Club has a good and hard working Committee and group of officers, but fresh blood is always welcome, especially from new members who want to get involved. We would like to have a list of volunteers who might like to help in some way in the future or immediately if we find a role to suit. The best way to register your interest would be to tell Mike Turton, our Secretary, at mike.turton@berksoc.org.uk who will maintain the list for us and make sure offers are made when opportunities come up. Another way to volunteer is to help out with the practical conservation tasks at some of the local nature reserves such as Moor Green Lakes, Lavell's Lake and Hosehill Lake or with CROW (Conserve Reading on Wednesdays). Ask John Lerpiniere at john.lerpiniere@berksoc.org.uk or any of the Committee for details of who to contact for more details of these.

Berkshire Bird Atlas



We are still seeking species sponsors for the Atlas. The BOC website has a list of species at http://www.berksoc.org.uk/atlas/sponsor_a_species.shtml where you can select a species and have your name linked to the project in perpetuity! Have a look at the section of the BOC website <http://www.berksoc.org.uk/atlas/index.shtml> where you can read much more about the Atlas and the way you can help, aside from helping us with the funding by sponsoring a species!

Colin Wilson

Photographic Competition 2011

This year's competition was once again very well supported, with some 150 pictures entered across the two categories ("Portrait" and "Action"). And, once again, there was a new winner of the Gordon Langsbury Cup, with congratulations going to Dave Bartlett for his lovely Portrait of a Blue Tit (showing that you do not need to travel far and wide and take pictures of exotic species to take great, winning pictures). Having said that, Brian Winter's great shot of a Martial Eagle carrying prey won the Action category and was taken in Africa!

Thanks go to London Camera Exchange (of Station Road, Reading) for their generous and valued support. Thanks also go to our judges Dave Cromack (Editor of Bird Art and Photography) and our president Gordon Langsbury, for their time and valued comments about all the entries.

For those who have not seen them, Dave's and Brian's pictures are reproduced below, but, with apologies, as this format can hardly do full justice to the quality of the original images.



Blue Tit by Dave Bartlett



Martial Eagle with Prey by Brian Winter

And Photographic Competition 2012

This year's competition was very successful, but we wish to make it as good as we can so, if you have any ideas or suggestions about how it is organized, how entries are handled and the rules, please let me know at colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk. In 2012 we expect to have a third category called 'Birds in Flight' as this would do more justice to these challenging images. Otherwise, Portrait and one called Bird Behaviour could make up the competition. We will provide more guidance nearer the time but it should allow most good images to be entered.

Colin Wilson

Upcoming Events

Enborne on Thursday 19th May - Mid-week Walk

Meet at Enborne Church (GR435658) at 10.00am. This is best reached from the south side of Newbury along Enborne Road. The Church is 2.5 miles from the town. The Church parking is somewhat small and so it would be best if members can share cars where possible. The walk is about 3.5 miles of easy going, part of it along the canal towpath and part through parkland.

Contact John Bleloch on 01635 42546

Grove Ferry, Kent on Sunday 22nd May - Full Day Excursion

Meet at Grove Ferry car park (TR235631) at 9.00am, off the A28 east of Canterbury (near Upstreet) for a walk around this excellent reserve and via the River Stour to Stodmarsh.

Contact Ted Rogers on 01344 883237

Padworth Common on Evening of 9th June (note changed date – was 16th June)

More than just Nightjars, should see some heathland and woodland birds as well. Meet at 8.30pm at car park in Silver Lane (SU628653), about 3 miles west of Mortimer Station.

Contact Fraser Cottingham on 07855 333616

Lakenheath RSPB on Sunday 19th June - Full Day Excursion

Excellent fenland reserve, with promise of cranes, golden orioles, bitterns and more. Meet at reserve car park (TL723865) at 9.30am, about 4 miles west of Brandon on B1112.

Contact Colin Wilson on 01252 837411

In addition there are also **two ringing demonstrations** (run by “Reading and Basingstoke Ringing”) which members may want to attend :

- **Sunday 10 July at Hosehill** from 7 am to 11 am in association with TABCG and West Berks Countryside Service
- **Sunday 21 August at Moor Green** as part of their Open day – times not available yet

And also don't forget about the coach trip to the BirdFair on Saturday 20th August! See item below.

Thinking of Going to the BirdFair?

If you're going to the annual BirdFair in August, plan ahead or, like Steve Thomson last year, you'll get more than you bargained for.

“A full coach load got off the bus in rainy Rutland at around 11am, many of them familiar faces. But that was the last I saw of most of them until four in the afternoon when we all got back on again. I could sum up my first visit to the BirdFair in one word: shell-shock. There's so much to see that everyone has their own agenda, so you must go prepared with your own game plan. I didn't - and merely sauntered through the first marquee I came to on a suck-it-and-see basis. Big mistake. About an hour later, I emerged into the damp daylight at the other end exhausted and loaded down with two carrier bags full of unwanted freebies. At this point I decided to consult the programme and realised, ‘Steve, you'd better get your skates on, you ain't seen nothing yet.’ Time to ditch all the goodies into the nearest available (environmentally friendly) waste bin and start again. And what fun I had: chatting to native Ugandans about wildlife holidays at prices far lower than offered by British operators; trying out lighter-to-handle telescopes and getting spoilt for choice; and actually doing some bird-watching in the hides only to hear the constant refrain, ‘If only you'd been here five minutes ago, you would have seen the ospreys’. By then the sun had come out, so I grabbed a cup of tea and sat outside, listening to an Ethiopian band, with tablas and several strange string instruments, playing their native music. But not for long, the wildlife artists' tent soon enticed me in with its exotically splashed paintings of parrots and just as quickly put me off with their equally imaginative price tags. And still there was just time to squeeze in a couple of lectures, one rather serious about the British bird atlas and another less so, which just about summed up the whole day, entitled ‘Weird, winged and wonderful!’”

The BOC BirdFair coach trip will take place on Saturday 20th August 2011. An event not to be missed by anyone with an interest in birdwatching. Please contact Ray Reedman (on 0118 9864338) to book your place. The cost (including entry to the Fair) will be about £27.

Queen Mother Reservoir

Thames Water has refitted the lock and chain on the BOC entry gate, so we are now free to visit outside the sailing club hours. We can visit from dawn to an hour after sunset, seven days a week. The combination on the entry gate, the BOC hut (where visitors must sign in and out) and the padlocks on the rim pathway gates were changed earlier this year; all permit holders on email were informed of the new combination. Any permit holders who have not got the new code should contact me (phone 0787 981 2564 or email renton.righelato@berksoc.org.uk).



A dozen or so members joined the BOC field trip to QMR and Staines Moor at the beginning of April. Two Great Northern Divers were most obliging and a male White Wagtail was seen by some of us on QMR. A Water Pipit put in a brief appearance on the Colne at Staines Moor.

Renton Righelato

BOC Trip to Pennington Marshes, October 2010

It was 10.10.10 and I suppose we should have arranged to start at 10 a.m. But by that time, a dozen or so of us were already enjoying a breezy day in the marshes. A grey start soon gave way to beautiful sunshine, the contrast symbolising the changing season which would be reflected in the day's birding.

Flocks of Starlings, Goldfinches and Greenfinches were very active over the scrub and grazing marsh. A number of Swallows were hawking over the area for most of the day, together with a few House Martins. Other small-bird activity during the day included a distant flock of Linnets and plenty of Meadow Pipits, but careful checks found us both Rock and Water Pipits too. The odd Grey Wagtail and a few Pied Wagtails were appreciated, but we were somewhat surprised to find a late Yellow Wagtail among the cattle, especially one without a tail! Less surprising were several passage Wheatears.

The sea-watching was not too productive, though there was one very active and elusive Red-throated Diver to confuse with two feeding Cormorants. There were plenty of the more common ducks in the pools, though the odd Pintail drake in partial eclipse proved a challenge and a good find. There were only modest numbers of Brent Geese, which were easily outnumbered by Canada Geese, whose grazing-neighbour was a Roe Deer.

Waders were a better bet generally: one of the pools by the path produced a male and a female Ruff, as well as long views of a Water Rail. Around the grazing marshes were several Curlews and Little Egrets. On a rising tide, the off-shore shingle-bars sported an assortment of Great Black-backed Gulls, Grey Plovers, Ringed Plovers, Oystercatchers, Knot and Dunlin, with eight Avocets making a brief touch-down. The patch of shingle beach near the breakwater produced several Turnstones and one Sanderling (*photo*). The pools were even more rewarding, because among the larger numbers of Black-tailed Godwits, Redshanks and others were a few Greenshanks and one juvenile Little Stint.



But the best came almost at the end of the walk, as we returned from the Keyhaven pools. A flock of Golden Plovers had landed in a pool which we had watched earlier. As we stopped to scan them I noticed that one stood out from the others. The most obvious feature was that it was in a later stage of moult than the rest, with shadows of its summer patterns still visible. But it seemed to have a more slender build too. I had seen plenty of American Golden Plovers on the other side of the Pond and the alarm bells started ringing. The difference was obvious to everyone else. Seen through the scope, the ground coloration of the mantle was distinctly greyish-brown, rather than the bright gold of the surrounding birds. I couldn't believe my luck when the bird raised its wings to show a greyish under-wing shading which was much darker than that shown by one of its neighbours. Moulting plumage is not covered well in reference books, but I could find nothing in them that evening to change my initial diagnosis. It had been a very lucky find to conclude a pleasant day out.

Ray Reedman

BOC Trip to Rainham Marshes RSPB, Sunday 7th November 2010

It was a fairly cold and overcast morning when 11 members met at the reserve car park, but at least it was dry. The club had visited this reserve only once before, in 2007, soon after it opened to the public, when there were few facilities other than the comfortable reserve centre. Since then there had been significant changes—the centre has a good cafeteria, there is several 100 metres of boardwalks through the reed-beds and there are two hides, one rather basic and the other huge and ultra-modern. The RSPB is currently experimenting with hide design at this and several other popular reserves (e.g. at Titchwell). Innovations include big, angled windows (to keep most of the rain off), various ways of opening and closing the windows using ropes and pulleys, lower telescope shelves and swivelling stools instead of benches. These features are good when the hides are fairly empty but a hindrance when there are lots of people using them (and the low telescope shelves are too low and so they give me backache!).

But you want to know what birds we saw, not where we saw them from! In fact it was rather quiet. There were plenty of wildfowl, but almost all common ones, except for two rather shy pink-footed geese. There were about 1000 waders, mostly lapwing of course, but with c70 golden plover, 20 or so dunlin and a smattering of snipe, redshank and black-tailed godwits. By mid-morning the sun was out and it was quite pleasant. There were huge flocks of starlings, maybe as many as 10,000. We searched the flock of about 100 large gulls but failed to find any of the rarer ones. The best birds of the day were cetti's warblers – several gave reasonable views for those who persisted – and a small flock of bearded tits came very close to the boardwalk then stayed for 10 minutes or more providing perfect views. Unfortunately for us, none of the several rarer species seen at the reserve in the previous few days put in an appearance. However it was a pleasant day out and we put nearly 60 species on our list.



Bill Nicoll

PS Editor's note; Bill's comments remind me of my own continual complaints about hide designs, which rarely seem to be comfortable for 'normal' sized people, but of course I am well over 6 feet tall and maybe you can't please everybody. But sometimes it seems they don't please anyone!

Maps at Special Prices for BOC Members

The Club has made a special arrangement with Dash4it (see www.dash4it.co.uk) a specialist Ordnance Survey Map supplier for a special discount for our members. Normally they offer 30% off plus free first class delivery but by using the code BIRD5 at the secure checkout BOC members get an additional 5% discount. That makes a really useful reduction in map prices. OS maps are the highest detailed and best quality maps available and are excellent for finding your way around, knowing where footpaths and bridleways are and generally planning visits for birdwatching or just walking. Explorer maps are best suited to birders needs in our experience as they have great detail on them. Dash4it will also pay for additional advertising in our publications in future if there is a good response to this offer so if you want or need a map just go to this website, order what you want and it will be on the doormat the next day!

A promotional banner for the Berkshire Ornithological Club. On the left, there is a black and white image of a bird in flight. The background is blue. The text is as follows: "Berkshire Ornithological Club" in large white letters, "member & affiliates discount" in smaller yellow letters, "30% Off OS Maps" in large red letters, "+5% BOC Discount" in yellow letters, "Enter Code 'BIRD5' At Checkout" in yellow letters, and "www.dash4it.co.uk" in red letters at the bottom. In the bottom left corner, there is the Ordnance Survey logo.