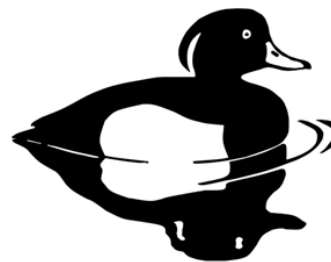


BOC Newsletter

Spring 2012

No 56



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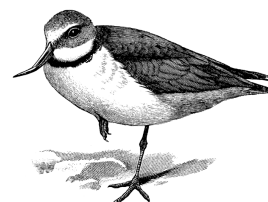
Introduction

Welcome to the somewhat belated winter edition of the Club newsletter, now oddly coinciding neatly with the start of spring! Sorry for the delay, but an extended trip to New Zealand rather got in the way (and a very good trip it was too, in case you are wondering!). Although the trip was not primarily for birdwatching, I did manage to see a few birds in my travels, including some of the endemics so beloved of the world listers. Indeed, one of the highlights for me was seeing the Wrybill, a delightful little wader found only in NZ. It is not an uncommon, but is notable for being the only bird in the World which has a bill bent to the side (and always to the right)!

Although the Club’s indoor season is coming to an end, our trips and excursions calendar continues throughout the next few months - further details are shown in the item below and also in your Club programme card. The boat trip on Poole Harbour and the coach trip to the BirdFair deserve special mention, both excellent trips well worth supporting. Early commitment to these trips really helps the organisation so please contact Ray Reedman as soon as possible to register your interest. As for all outings, good company and birds are assured!

The next newsletter will go out in May, so please get any items to me by the end of April.

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

Sponsor a Species!

Please help with the preparation and publication of the new Birds of Berkshire Atlas and Avifauna by sponsoring a species. Sponsors will be acknowledged individually in the book and will be given a 20% discount on the publication price.

The Birds of Berkshire will be a book of approximately 450 pages in a large colour format. As well as the maps, it will be illustrated with line drawings of each species and photographs of the different habitats found across the county. Although the book is being prepared entirely by volunteers, we need to raise funds to provide a high quality publication at an accessible price. We are aiming for publication in 2013.

A list of species available for sponsorship and a donation form are included with this newsletter.

Subscriptions

A final reminder to those who have not yet renewed their membership. All who have not renewed have had a reminder from Heidi or me and at the end of March we will assume non-payers have resigned their membership. Two of those contacted expressed their intention to renew but no payments have been received. Hopefully this will remind them of their promise.

Non-payment of subscriptions occurs each year and I was interested to see a note in our accounts dated 11 Jan 1951, "Postage for 29 reminders re sub--2 shillings 5 pence". This is a postal rate of one old penny per letter; it now costs a lot more. In January 1951 we held £16 5s 9d in our accounts; we now hold a lot more.

John Roberts

Upcoming Trips and Excursions

Sunday 22nd April 2012

New Forest, Hampshire (Full day)

Early morning start to get woodland birds in full song. Meet at Bolderwood car park, 3 miles west of Lyndhurst (SU242086) at 8:00 am. Contact Martin Sell (01189 471170)

Thursday 26th April 2012 (note: 4th Thursday of the month)

Searle's Lane GPs (Mid-week walk)

Nightingales and herons. Meet at the Cunning Man pub, Burghfield (SU682708) where there is ample parking. Contact John Lerpiniere (0118 3751756)

Saturday 5th May 2012

Otmoor RSPB (Half or full day)

Warblers, hobbies and passage waders. Meet at the reserve car park north of Beckley village (SP570126) at 9:00am. Contact Bill Nicoll (01344 455403)

Saturday 12th May 2012

Portland, Dorset (Coach trip with East berks RSPB)

Top migration site. Pick-up at 07:00 am in the lay-by on Braywick Road, Maidenhead outside Braywick Park (SL6 1BN, SU891799), where there is free parking. The trip costs £18.00 per person. Contact Ernie Allen (East Berks RSPB organiser) on 01628 625324.

Thursday 17th May 2012

Basildon Park, Berkshire (Mid-week walk)

Lovely parkland and woodland site. Meet at the National Trust car park. There may be a small charge (£3 we think) for non members of NT. Contact Renton Righelato (0787 981 2564).

Friday 25th to Sunday 27th May 2012

Anglesey, Wales (Weekend Trip by car)

Birds not easily found in the South. Contact Colin Wilson (01252 837411) before the end of March.

Saturday 9th June 2012 (Provisional date)

Seabird cruise from Poole, Dorset (Afternoon and evening)

Splendid way to see the seabirds of the South Coast. Contact Ray Reedman (01189 864338) no later than mid-March. Early commitment needed.

Thursday 15th June 2012

Padworth Common (Evening trip: mid-week walk)

Nightjars and other crepuscular species. Meet at Padworth Common (SU619647), 3 miles south of Aldermaston Wharf (A4/A340 junction) at 8:00 pm. Contact John Roberts (0118 948 2137)

Saturday 18th August 2012

Rutland Water Bird Fair (Full day by coach)

Ever popular day out to this annual event., plus some good birds.

Coach will leave Newbury, the Wharf at 6.30am, Reading University main gate in Shinfield Road at 7:00am and Braywick Park entrance, Braywick Road, Maidenhead at 07:30am. Cost will be about £30 (including entry).

Contact Ray Reedman (01189 864338)

North East Poland Trip

Those people that have heard Marek Borkowski talk will know something of the spectacular Biebrza Marshes, a unique habitat in Europe, well-known for its Aquatic Warbler and Great Snipe populations. It is also a good place for many birds of prey, including Lesser and Greater Spotted Eagles. Nearby Citrine Wagtails breed and you may see four species of Harriers. The Bialowieza Forest is home to most of the European woodpeckers, including White-backed, Three-toed, Black, Lesser, Middle and Greater Spotted. Nutcrackers may be seen.

Marek Borkowski has offered to run a 7 day tour to NE Poland for BOC members in May 2013: *“The way I much prefer to organize trips is an all included tour, covering accommodation, food, transport, English speaking leader, local guides where appropriate, entrance fees, permits, using some of our conveniences, etc. It is much more bird productive this way, as we do not loose time for long unnecessary drives, waiting for meals, dealing with inexperienced drivers, wasting time for finding places, queuing, waiting, etc. and I can also assure the quality. Accommodation then is in small, well placed, comfortable hotels, on twin/double rooms with private facilities en suite basis, with single rooms possibility. A reception at my farm, visiting "gardens", seeing horses, early morning coffees, birdlists, etc. are also included - basically everything except for alcohol (apart from one or two occasions) and items of strictly private character.”*

If you are interested in taking part, please let me know as I need to give Marek an indication of how many people to plan for. The all-in price will be around £1,050 excluding the flights to and from Warsaw and excluding alcohol).

Renton Righelato (renton.righelato@berksoc.org.uk or tel. 0787 981 2564)

Fobney Island – Ready, Steady, Go!

Major works reshaping the island and river to create a new wetland reserve at Reading are complete and it is all systems go for planting-up of shrubs and herbs.

Fobney Island is alongside the Kennet and Avon Canal where the canal enters the south west of the borough. It can be reached from the A33 relief road, turn towards ‘The Tip’ (Waste Recycling Centre) then right at the end of the road. There is a small parking space before the lock at SU705710.

BOC has been working with several organisations, the lead taken by the Environment Agency and Reading Borough Council, to advise on design and facilities at each step of the planning. Pools and scrapes have been created some of which are seasonal depending on river and groundwater levels, a footpath winds through the eastern half and two viewing hides built towards the west. This will enable the public to enjoy half of the reserve whilst the west will be a refuge for wildlife where the planting of shrubs will limit disturbance to birds.

The river has also been enhanced by raising some of the bed, some reshaping, and felling of trees, all creating variety of flow and niches required by fish and other riparian species. The shrubs and herbs will be planted and sown by the spring after which the footpath will be opened to allow access. Meanwhile all can be viewed from the towpath and a circular walk is possible by crossing the bridge at the west.

Bird sightings have previously been poor with just the odd Stonechat wintering, though Barn Owls also winter, Kestrels are ever-present and the occasional Kingfisher appears at the west, Grey Wagtails at the east. With raised river bed and recent rains a new small cut has already allowed water to flow into the scrapes. I particularly look forward to the first autumn wader passage.

Monitoring of all species is important from these early stages to record change to inform future projects and BOC has promised to support. A ‘friends’ group will be formed but it is expected that other voluntary groups including BOC members will help with future maintenance. One small drawback with regard to records, the west end from 10m before the pylon is not only in a different 1km square (SU6971) but a different 10km square (SU7071). This is inconvenient if you record on BirdTrack for instance. Meanwhile please pay a visit and please record all you see.

John Lerpiniere

Worth a Visit - Lower Farm, Newbury

For those who don’t know of it, the gravel pit at Lower Farm (SU507625), between Thatcham and Newbury, is a good site for water birds and waders. It has a large hide that has been provided by Tarmac for public use. The Newbury District Ornithological Club helps to look after the hide and provides information and a sightings book. Well worth a visit if you are in the area.

Fishermen's Friends

Bird watchers and anglers have a lot in common. We both spend a lot of time out in the cold, staring at expanses of water in lonely places. We are both interested in Nature and wetland areas; though it seems to me that most anglers know a lot more about birds than birders do about fish. So it came as a shock to me to hear that some Berkshire bird-watchers had been offensive to a number of anglers over access to lakes and over maintenance work on angling sites, which has resulted in a loss of goodwill and the withdrawal of certain access privileges for bird-watchers.

Anglers often pay a lot for fishing rights and have costly equipment that they understandably do not want damaged. They also own or lease a number of private sites to which they may allow access to bird-watchers or the public at large – we go there on sufferance.

Last year the BOC had a number of constructive meetings with Reading & District Angling Association to discuss their and our concerns. Amongst other things we discussed the clearance of scrub around parts of the Searles Lane GPs, which was needed for the health of the fish stocks, and possible mitigation measures for the resultant loss of some Nightingale habitat. We have also worked with the anglers on the planning of the new wetland reserve at Fobney Island. Bird-watchers and anglers have shared interests in protecting our natural environment – let's be friends!

Renton Righelato

BOC Trip to the Isle of Sheppey – January 2012

On reflection, “be careful what you wish for” is a saying I really should take more seriously as, having said that Sheppey is a ‘proper’ winter birdwatching place and prone to being a bit windy, my prophecy turned out to be all too accurate on the day of our trip. But while it was windy (even for January), it was (for January) surprisingly mild and dry, so our visit was pretty comfortable (for January) and although we had to work quite hard for our birds it proved to be worth the effort.

A stalwart group of 10 met on the sea-front at Leysdown towards the eastern end of Sheppey, where Sanderling and Turnstones fed along the tide line and, out at sea, Gannets and Red-throated Divers passed by, albeit a fair way out.

Rather than tackle the often rough and hazardous (to car's under-parts) track out to Shellness, we opted to walk along sea wall, braving the brisk cross wind. On arrival on the shore on the Shellness Reserve it was hard to miss the Brent Geese on the sea, along with large numbers of Mallards with, upon closer inspection, a smattering of female Common Scoters. Better still was the Red Throated Diver which showed very well to all, as it fished out in the channel.

With high tide imminent, we headed for the shelter of the old block house and a good (and wind-free) view of the wader roost. A fine gathering of roosting birds showed well in the bright sunshine (I know, it was a bit of a surprise to us as well!). The flocks included good numbers of Oystercatchers, Redshanks, Grey Plovers, Knot and Dunlin and, among the Bar-tailed Godwits, an unusual leucistic individual, ghostly pale amongst its normally-plumaged fellows. As the tide edged up the shingle, explosions of flying waders provided quite a spectacle as they lifted off to fly around before resettling in more comfortable positions.



The return walk to the cars retraced our steps along the sea-wall, where our diligence and hard work were rewarded with the sighting of a single Purple Sandpiper, as it huddled in the lee of a post among the groynes.

Suitably refreshed with the remains of lunches not eaten earlier, we then moved the cars round to the Harty Ferry raptor viewpoint. The earliest arrivals reported little activity, but the arrival of the leader prompted some bird activity as at least two Peregrines took to the air above us and Marsh Harriers quartered the reedbeds. A distant raptor sitting on a fence post was the subject of much discussion and never properly identified, although the sudden appearance of a female Hen Harrier seemed to coincide with the post being left vacant. Sadly the leader's knack of prompting bird activity deserted him at this point and, despite a patient wait, none of the promised owls put in an appearance (both Short-eared and Barn Owls are regularly seen here) and as the temperature dropped as dusk approached, we finally admitted defeat and headed for home.

Ted Rogers

PS It is worth saying, for those planning a visit in the near future, that the track down to Shellness did not look too bad and several cars managed to navigate it without incident during our visit.