

Berkshire Ornithological Club

AGM 2013/4 - Chairman's Report

1 Membership

We are grateful to Iain Oldcorn who is an efficient membership secretary.

During the year membership has remained fairly static and is currently 318, and there has been a slight falloff in the rate of new memberships this year.

The majority of membership payments by Standing Order have been made at the appropriate time and the rate of payments by cash or cheque is possibly slower so we'd appreciate it if as many members as possible could switch to Standing Orders.

2 Meetings and Field trips

Once again there was a varied programme of 11 talks, the photographic competition, a Christmas social evening and an identification workshop. Highlights of the talks were presentations the BTO's Dawn Balmer and James Pierce-Higgins. Unfortunately, the experimental Saturday meeting at Reading Museum proved unpopular with club members, with less than half the usual number attending an excellent talk by Katrina Van Grouw. In fact, for all indoor meetings the average attendance was markedly lower than the previous years, and even the ever-popular Keith Offord drew only a modest turn-out. A spectacularly wet winter may not have helped.

That certainly was a problem outdoors... Two coach trips were planned, but one to Ouse Washes in January was cancelled due to extreme flooding on the roads and at the site. This was a pity, as it had been well-booked. The Rutland Bird Fair coach trip in August went ahead, but with a number of empty seats, and made a substantial loss. Members were also able to participate in three coach trips organised by the East Berks RSPB group.

The two Raptormania trips to Andalucia were a great success as usual, thanks to Ken White's enthusiastic efforts.

The remaining outdoor programme consisted of a further eighteen trips, ranging from local mid-week walks to longer trips by car. The autumn proved to be something of a curate's egg: good attendance at Oare Marshes and Cliffe in Kent coincided with fine weather and superb birding, but one or two later trips were lacking either birds or participants. The extreme wet weather of the winter washed out one mid-week walk and limited some of the activity of an otherwise successful Norfolk trip. Spring trips were moderately well-attended and in general the birding was fairly good. Two June evening outings coincided with good conditions and both were both popular and successful in their objectives.

3 Building a younger Club

We are eager to increase the number of younger members as this will help to keep the Club running effectively in future years. When I was a teenage birder it seemed to be logical to be a member of the county ornithological club where I lived as that gave me good information on what was being seen and where to see birds as well as good analysis of local records. It also encouraged me to submit my records.

Throughout my life I have lived in a variety of English counties and so I have been a member of a number of county bird clubs and to be honest I think we have a very good record of publications and conservation work. The main way we've tried to develop a younger membership so far has been to start establishing joint membership relationships with the University Ornithological Society – although this hasn't been formally established yet.

We'd be very happy to give talks and/or demonstrations to schools and young people clubs so if you know of organisations that would appreciate our input please let us know.

4 Rejuvenating Publications and Communications

Becky Thomas, assisted by Chris Foster, have worked on the development of the Club's Facebook page and the way that Twitter is used. Currently quite a few of the Facebook Group members aren't Club members so that is helping with publicity. Please feel free to join the Group and make posts about events and birds and/or comment on other people's posts.

Publication of *The Birds of Berkshire* was a huge success with good reviews nationally, the project has produced a good financial surplus which is giving a substantial boost to the club's conservation fund, to be spent on bird-focused conservation work in the county.

The efforts to produce *The Birds of Berkshire* slowed down our efforts to produce annual reports but we are now beginning to catch up and reports for 2009 and 2010 appeared in 2014 and 2011 will be appearing fairly shortly.

The club website is being fully redeveloped so that it works in all formats including tablets and smartphones. It is being built using a content management system which means that delegated individuals will be able to keep the pages they are responsible for up to date. A range of new features is also being added. Development work is currently in progress so the revised website should be active in the new year.

5 Berkshire Records Committee / Recorder Review

The five yearly review of the county records committee and recorder is in progress and will be completed by mid-2015. This process is carried out jointly with the Newbury District Ornithological Club. We are already aware of a number of concerns of county birders and if you have any specific concerns about how the county records are dealt with and would like to see them included in the review process please send details to me before the year end so we can make sure we include them and deal with them satisfactorily.