



Berkshire Ornithological Club

Minutes of Committee Meeting

held on Thursday 13th October 2016
at Park House, University of Reading

Present: Eleanor Pitts (Treasurer), Sally Wearing (Secretary), Robin Dryden, Chris Foster, Renton Righelato (RRi), Ray Reedman (RRe), Ted Rogers.

- 1. Apologies for absence:** Neil Bucknell (President), Richard Stansfield (Acting Chair), Becky Thomas, Sue Charnley, Andy Horscroft, Iain Oldcorn.

The meeting was not quorate as only four elected committee members were present. Therefore no significant decisions were taken at the meeting, but were decided by email during the week after the meeting. These decisions are included in these minutes.

RRi chaired the meeting in the absence of RS and NB.

- 2. Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 7th July 2016**

The minutes were approved, by those at the meeting and by email afterwards. They were not signed.

Action: SW to include signing the 7th July minutes at the next committee meeting.

- 3. Matters Arising**

Item 8 (Retirement of Jeremy Davy, WBC Biodiversity Officer): RRi had provided input to RS to write to the Head of WBC's planning department to explain the value of what Jeremy had done and the importance of West Berks as a conservation area.

Action: RRi to write to WBC, if RS has not already done so.

- 4. Formal record of items agreed by email since the last meeting**

One item had been decided by email since the last meeting: the appointment of Richard Burness as the new County Recorder. The decision was unanimous.

- 5. Treasurer's Report**

The report, draft accounts and draft budget were circulated prior to this meeting and were discussed.

EP was happy to continue with the CAF bank. However, the club still had more accounts (4) than was necessary. The Santander account should be kept as standing orders for subscriptions went into this account, which would be difficult to alter. EP recommended closing one of the two CAF deposit accounts, i.e. the CAF Conservation Fund account, as this does not pay any interest, unlike the CAF Gold account.

It was decided to close the CAF Conservation Fund account by those at the meeting and by email afterwards.

Action: EP to close CAF Conservation Fund and to transfer balance to CAF Gold Account.

The name of the CAF Conservation Fund account is misleading as it does not hold the Club's conservation funds. RRi said that the conservation funds were restricted; they did not need to be kept in a separate account but they must be identified in the accounts. The status of various payments into the conservation fund was discussed, for instance donations from subscriptions were not necessarily restricted but the money from the sales of the Bird Atlas definitely was.

EP outlined the draft accounts. There was no unusual income. RRI said that the £100 income from the LCE advert in the 2012 Annual Report should be included in report sales, not donations. The cost of the room hire was higher than in 2014-15, as it included two deposits due to the University changing its requirements. Overall, if the £12,000 donations were taken out of the income, the excess was about £290 for the year. RRI pointed out the status of the Conservation Fund at the end of the accounts was incorrect, as it should include another £12,000 as shown under income.

Phil Caunt had reviewed the draft accounts and provided initial comments to EP, emphasising that he had not audited or examined the accounts and it was important that the Club did not use those terms. The only issue he had raised was a discrepancy of £428.92 that had arisen when setting the 2015-16 start balance for the Santander current account between the draft 2014-15 figures that were taken to the AGM and the final figures for 2014-15. It was clear that this discrepancy related to two sums (subs and unpaid trustee expenses) and that an adjustment had been made to account for them.

Action: EP to revise the draft accounts (including treating the Conservation Fund as restricted) and issue them to the committee for approval to present them to the AGM.

EP outlined the draft budget. The predicted income from subscriptions of £5,300 was acceptable for next year, however she felt that the Committee either needed to increase membership or find a cheaper venue for the indoor meetings, or both. RRI said that the cost of using the University had been discussed before, but no acceptable alternative had been found. CF asked how expensive it would have to become before it was unacceptable. EP asked if there was any chance of reducing the hire cost at the University, but RRe said that the Club already received a discount. Alternatives could be sought for future years. He offered to investigate hiring the hall at St Joseph's School, near the University, although this might be unreliable, as the school may need it for rehearsals.

Action: RRe to investigate hiring the hall at St Joseph's School for indoor meetings.

EP asked if it was planned to publish one or two annual reports; RRI said there should be two, but there were reserves available from the years when no reports were produced.

RRI said that there was no contingency in the budget, and the predicted expenditure was slightly below the income, which was not sustainable. He said that income had to be increased, through more members or other forms of income. Data sales were likely to decrease as other sources were available for the data the BOC had provided. TR asked whether membership fees should be increased, as it was about five years since the last increase. RRI said this could risk losing members who might review their membership when asked to amend their standing orders. TR pointed out that the Club would have to consider using direct debits at some point.

Action: EP to investigate the possibility of using direct debits for subscriptions.

RRe said that we could ask for a small fee from members for attending indoor meetings, as at RSPB meetings, although this may put people off coming. The general view was that the committee needed to consider how to raise funds, including a membership drive and considering other sources of income, and that time should be set aside to discuss this.

Action: SW to include increasing income in the agenda of the January committee meeting.

Those present at the meeting accepted the budget. The rest of the committee accepted it by email after the meeting.

6. Membership Secretary's Report

The report was circulated prior to this meeting and discussed. IO was unable to attend the meeting, and had sent further information via SW to inform the discussion: "I have now had more subs arrived in the post and had time to process the bulk Standing Orders that came in on 3 Oct. So of 301 Members on 30 Sept: 6 are definitely "Not Renewing", 248 Subs have been received leaving 47 to be chased further (10 of these are missing "Standing Orders")."

RRi commented that the trend in membership appeared to be downward and that needed to be addressed, as had already been discussed.

IO had also sent information on the success of the annual mailing: "A number of members have again claimed not to have received the mid-August email with its membership renewal form and AGM material etc.; it might be worth sending out the renewal form in a separate email in future." TR said that some email systems treated the mailing as spam, while RRI said that it could also be sent separately.

Publicity Sub-committee

RS had been unable to attend the meeting or to make any progress with publicity due to pressure of work. The outstanding actions from the minutes of 7th July were considered. Actions concerning distributing the BOC's leaflets are to be continued. It was agreed that it would be useful to have a stock of the standard leaflet together with the programme card.

Action: SW to get 100 leaflets and programme cards printed for distribution to the committee and at indoor meetings.

7. Programme Sub-committee report

The report was circulated prior to this meeting and discussed. The dates for the current year and the coming year in the report were incorrect, and the date of the first indoor meeting in 2017-18 should be 4th October, not 3rd October.

Indoor programme 2017-18: the dates were similar to this year, with a one week gap between meetings in December. The possibility of booking Iolo Williams as a speaker was discussed. The cost would be £1200, plus an extra £100-£120 for the large theatre. RRe felt it was achievable but would require a higher fee for non-members, a smaller charge for members and a formal raffle. Overall it was felt to be too big a risk. RRI thought it would be good publicity but that it was costly and a sponsor should be sought. RRe suggested it might be better to invite someone like the CEO of WWT or BTO.

RRe had met the Warden, Carl Francis, at Lord Harris Court at Sindlesham and was waiting for a response from Carl about RRe's ideas about setting up a bird group for the residents. One benefit for the BOC is that it may be possible to use it as a venue for workshops etc.

RRe said that he will be 80 in 2018 and wants to have stood down by then. RRI said the club had to find someone to work with him on the programme for a handover period.

8. Conservation Sub-committee report

The report was circulated before the meeting and discussed. The next meeting of the sub-committee has been postponed to 14th November.

RRI informed the meeting about Local Nature Partnerships, which were organisations that brought together everyone involved in biodiversity to create a strategy for nature at county level. The Berkshire LNP had been defunct, but it was now up and running again, with a new staff member and office. The BOC was keen to work with them.

EP said that people had been contacting her about the petition concerning the proposed development at Theale Main Pit. RRI said that the planning committee had not yet met to discuss it. This may happen on 23rd November, however it may be delayed.

9. Editorial Board Report

The report was circulated before the meeting and discussed. The 2013 report (not 2017!) was now with Rob Still who was preparing it for publication. The report was only missing the BRC report and two articles from Chris Heard. The BRC needed to provide the list of unaccepted records (not including the name of who had submitted them) and RD said that the BRC had started working on this. RRI hoped the report would be ready to go out at the AGM, if the rest of the content was provided quickly.

Action: RD to ensure data is provided by BRC as soon as possible for the 2013 report.

10. County Recorder

The new County Recorder, Richard Burness, had been appointed and was keen to get on with the work. RRI proposed that the committee should formally invite the CR to come to a BOC Committee meeting in about six months to report on progress.

Action: RRI to invite CR to BOC Committee meeting in March to report progress.

It was also suggested that the new CR should be invited to an indoor meeting to meet BOC members, to help improve relations with birders in Berks. TR said the CR could give a short talk to the Club, which RRe suggested could be at a members' evening in the future. This would depend on the CR having something interesting to relate, such as his past work on marine surveys.

RRI said that now the new CR was in place, it would be possible to get on with modernising the reporting/recording process. The following actions could now be implemented.

Action: RRI to organise the working group to review collecting and managing records.

Action: RRI to organise a meeting of the editorial board and to ask Richard Burness to join.

11. Other Events

SW informed the meeting about an invitation to celebrate the founding of Wild Maidenhead on Tuesday 25th October. RRI said they were trying to get groups like the BOC interested.

12. Elections to Committee

The report was circulated before the meeting and was discussed. Since then RS had informed the Committee that he was no longer able to stand as Chairman or to continue as an elected Committee Member, as he would be working outside the UK. This meant that there were vacancies for Chairman and three Ordinary Members of the Committee. AH will be standing for the other vacancy.

IO had informed the meeting that he thought a job description was needed for the role of Chairman, and that, while he would be willing to chair indoor meetings or committee meetings, he felt the Chairman needs to be somebody of standing within the birding community. RD agreed that the Chairman needed to be well thought of, with good contacts, an effective public speaker and manager. Various possibilities were discussed.

TR suggested that the role could be split, i.e. indoor meetings and committee meetings. SC had asked in the past whether other people could chair indoor meetings. RRI felt that this would be a good way of getting the committee known among members. It was generally agreed that other people could chair indoor meetings, on a voluntary basis, possibly on a rota. RRe was happy to be the 'fall back' if necessary.

A number of suggestions were made for people who may be willing to stand for election, either as Chairman or Ordinary Members. It was felt that it someone from the University should be on the committee, possibly a member of the student bird club.

Action: CF to approach Student Bird Club to seek someone to stand for election to the BOC.

It was agreed to ask the rest of the committee for ideas by email, then to decide who would approach them.

Action: SW to ask committee for ideas of who to contact as possible committee members.

Action: All to approach identified people as necessary to ask them to stand for election.

It was also agreed to ask members at the forthcoming indoor meetings for volunteers.

Action: NB to advertise vacancies at indoor meetings.

As RS was not available, someone else needed to create the Chairman's report for the AGM.

Action: SW to ask NB to collate the Chairman's report for the AGM.

Action: RRI to ask Ken Moore to provide the bird report for the AGM.

13. Reports for consideration

Social Media Update

There was little to report. Some good photographs had been posted on the Facebook page.

14. Any Other Business

TR said that he thought the newsletter was not thriving. He felt it needed more general information about the Club, but he did not get much input, except from RRe. RRe said he had two items to be included. The next newsletter was due at Christmas. It was a link to the Club for the people who do not come to indoor meetings.

RRe said that other organisations kept information about past events on their websites, however the BOC website did not.

Action: RRe to investigate keeping information about past events on the BOC website.

The domain name berksoec.uk was available; there was no interest in reserving it.

RRe reported that John Fox of Geoffrey Field Junior School, who had approached the BOC for help with a school project, was going ahead. There would be a talk at an assembly on birds and they were setting up feeders.

15. Dates and venue for next meetings

It was no longer possible to book the usual room at Park House, as BT had left the University and CF was not a member of the SCR. Another venue was needed. RRe said his house could be used if necessary, but it was not big enough for the whole committee in comfort.

Action: NB to ask at an indoor meeting for ideas for a venue for committee meetings.

Action: All to find a new venue for committee meetings.

The dates for the next two meetings are:

Thursday 12th January at 8pm, venue to be decided

Thursday 30th March at 8pm, venue to be decided.

Sally Wearing
21st October 2016