



Berkshire Ornithological Club

Minutes of Committee Meeting

held on Thursday 31st March 2016
at Park House, University of Reading

Present: Neil Bucknell (President), Richard Stansfield (Acting Chair), Sally Wearing (Secretary), Eleanor Pitts (Treasurer), Robin Dryden, Chris Foster, Sue Charnley, Andy Horscroft, Renton Righelato (RRi), Ray Reedman (RRe), Iain Oldcorn.

1. **Apologies for absence:** Ted Rogers, Becky Thomas.
2. **Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 14th January 2016**

The minutes were approved and signed.

3. **Matters Arising**

Item 13 (Elections to committee): There was still one vacancy on the committee. It had been agreed at the last meeting that the committee should seek people willing to be elected earlier in the year, well in advance of the AGM.

Action: All to identify people who may be willing to stand for the committee, to be discussed at the next committee meeting.

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

Two items had been formally agreed by email since the last meeting.

- The committee had voted to accept the recommendations of the BRC/County Recorder Review Panel. NB and RRi were due to meet Chris Heard on 4th April.
- It had been decided to co-opt Andy Horscroft as an Ordinary Committee Member.

5. **Treasurer's Report**

The report was circulated prior to this meeting and was discussed.

EP had reviewed the Club's banking arrangements following the Charity Commission guidance. It was agreed that the Club should keep its three CAF accounts, but that it should close two of the accounts with Santander, leaving one Santander account, as most standing orders were paid into this account.

Action: EP to close two of the Santander bank accounts.

The committee agreed that it was acceptable for EP to move money between accounts without asking the Committee. IO said that this was how it had been done in the past. EP confirmed that she would only move money between accounts, not between funds.

It was decided that the Club should continue to use CAF Donate for a year to monitor how successful it is.

EP raised the issue of subscription charges. These are usually discussed at the next committee meeting in order to co-ordinate with the annual mailing. There were no plans to change them at present.

Some money is in accounts that are paying little or no interest, which was acceptable.

Another question raised by the CC's guidance was whether the Club has adequate safeguards in place to prevent fraud. EP reported that the only area that was not scrutinised was the handover and banking of raffle money. IO volunteered to be included in the process

to ensure that it was secure. If he is informed of the amount collected at each raffle, he can then check that it had been paid into the bank.

Action: SC to email IO with the amount collected after each raffle, so he can check it has been banked.

Action: IO to be given access to view the Santander current account.

Reserves policy: The CC recommended that charities should have a reserves policy. EP had drafted one which was circulated before the meeting and discussed. The conservation fund was separate to general funds but currently had no ongoing commitments. It was agreed that the Club should hold about £10,000 in reserves to cover the costs of the annual indoor meeting programme and the production of four annual reports (i.e. 2013 to 2016).

Action: EP to revise the draft reserves policy accordingly.

Asset register: the existing asset register was circulated before the meeting. It was last updated in 2014. It was decided that the archive did not need to be included. The laminator was to be passed from RRe to RS. RRe already held the presentation controller/pointer.

Action: All to inform EP if there is anything to be added to the asset register.

Action: SW to include asset register on the agenda of this committee meeting in the future.

EP expressed her thanks to Bill Nicholl, IO and SW for their help since she had taken over as Treasurer.

6. Membership Secretary's Report

The report was circulated prior to this meeting and discussed.

There was little to report about the University Bird Society. Since it had been decided not to pursue a formal affiliation, there was no need to keep it on the agenda of future meetings. CF would raise any issues if necessary.

The involvement of students in trips was discussed, including whether it was worth publicising the outdoor programme to the UBS. There was currently no way of emailing members of the UBS, but it could be worth emailing the main UBS contact.

Action: CF to find contact details for the UBS for publicising trips.

Publicity Sub-committee

RS thanked those who had helped publicise "Emptying the skies". He did not have anything specific to report.

The importance of publicity was discussed; it is needed to draw attention to the Club's activities and to attract new members. RRe mentioned the Early Green Fair (6th August 2016); all other local conservation groups will be represented there. If the BOC wants to be involved, we need to book a space.

The use of the Club's publicity leaflets was discussed. They had been put in bird hides (e.g. at Dinton) and they usually go quite quickly. RRe said his contact at the Town Hall was asking for leaflets, however RS said the leaflets he had seen there were fairly hidden. IO pointed out that the club rarely got new members through the leaflets, although people might join via the website. He had distributed them to various libraries in the past, however posters might be better on display boards.

Action: RS to send leaflets and posters to IO and anyone else who may be able to use them.

RRe said that Estelle Bailey (BBOWT) was keen to help publicise events. It might be difficult to co-ordinate timings, but if he can finalise next year's programme soon, he will send it to her to publicise.

Action: RRe to try to publicise BOC events via BBOWT.

Publicising club events via other media (e.g. TV, radio, newspapers) was discussed. RS had contacted some papers, but was not sure how effective this was. RRI said that we should try to provide interesting items to the media, so that they got into the habit of contacting us. Other local publications were also discussed.

Action: RS to contact BBC Radio Berks, Berkshire Media Group, Maidenhead Advertiser, Reading Post and any other suitable publications, with suitable news items (e.g. housing development in conservation report).

Action: RS to contact London Camera Exchange to ask them to take leaflets.

Action: RS to bring leaflets to indoor meetings to ask members to distribute them.

7. Programme Sub-committee report

The report was circulated prior to this meeting and discussed.

Indoor programme

The attendances at the 2015-16 indoor meetings had generally declined, with 30 – 40 at most meetings; only two had over 50. The turnout did not appear to be linked to who the speaker was. It was agreed that this was not due to the programme, which people had enjoyed, but it might be linked to the age profile of the membership.

The BOC projector was still considered by the judges to be inadequate for the photographic competition. Colin Wilson has suggested we should borrow or hire a better one next year. However, the judges used the image on the laptop screen, not the projected one. All of the committee were happy with the projected images this year, therefore it was agreed that a different projector was not necessary. RRI said that we could use his if preferred.

Action: RRe to give feedback on the projector to Colin Wilson.

No feedback on the planned social event on Saturday 16th April had been received. After discussion, the committee agreed that the event should be cancelled. NB pointed out that April was a good time to be out birding, and that people who worked were likely to be busy at weekends.

Action: RRe to provide wording for IO to email to members and for SW to put on website.

The 2016-17 indoor programme was nearly finished; the University had confirmed the room booking. NB suggested that the AGM could be a "President's evening".

The proposed September social event was discussed. RRe suggested it could be an introduction to the Club for non-members; he was keen to bring in the general public without intimidating them. RRI said it was difficult to organise an afternoon event before the indoor meetings had started, so maybe it would be better in the middle of the season. It was thought that we could hold a different kind of event, e.g. an evening in the Harris Garden at the University. EP suggested we could tie an event in with Springwatch or similar. NB said that Theale Park may be a possible venue, and they may be interested in joint publicity for an evening event. It might be possible to hold an outdoor evening event to include birding, and Theale Park should be able to provide shelter in case of rain. NB also suggested we could organise something with the higher profile, possibly with a quasi-celebrity.

Action: All to consider ideas for a social event and to send them to RRe.

Outdoor programme

RRe asked for people to offer to organise walks, e.g. if anyone has a favourite patch and would like to take a group round on a Thursday or a weekend. He will ask all previous leaders, then will build a programme around what he is offered. IO recommended that RRe should identify other people who might lead a walk and then lean on them.

8. Conservation Sub-committee report

The draft minutes from the most recent conservation meeting, held on 21st March, were circulated and discussed.

Padworth Lane Gravel Pit: an outline application for a housing development had been turned down by West Berkshire Council, so the Canal and River Trust wished to pursue the possibility of creating a nature reserve, managed by the BOC, as proposed about a year ago. The first stage was to create a business plan, which will take about six months. BBOWT's property manager was willing to advise. It was expected that it would take two to three years to establish the reserve and a specially created charitable trust may need to be created. The Conservation Sub-committee was keen to take this forward. Money from the Conservation fund may be needed to pay for consultancy work. Other funding would be necessary, as the project would need more than the BOC could provide. The initial estimate was about £10,000 per year. NB was contacting a similar trust in Yorkshire for advice.

IO asked what access there would be. RRI said there was currently only access along the river bank, but the intention was to put in a circular route with viewing points, possibly about 1.5 km long. The site was a very species rich area.

The Committee agreed that the project should go ahead.

Action: RRe to give a presentation at the next meeting on this project.

Burghfield Park: a revised planning application had been put in for development at Theale Main Pit. The Theale Area Bird Conservation Group (TABCG) had asked the BOC for help to object to the application. AH encouraged individuals to object to the plans, as an objection from a group only counted as one objection. RRI said the strongest argument was that it was a stronghold for nightingales. Consultation had not yet opened, but objections should be made when it does, either online on the WBC website or in writing. Grounds for objecting need to be phrased in planning terms, and should be relevant to local plans and policies, e.g. based on potential damage to threatened species. When consultation started, the BOC should provide information to help people object, via the website and an appeal to members.

Action: NB to provide information to help people object to the development and to inform the committee when the consultation starts.

RRI said that awareness could be raised before consultation starts, especially as nightingales would be arriving in the next few weeks.

Action: RRI & RS to publicise the proposed development, including putting information on the BOC website and asking councillors and Radio Berks to come to hear the nightingales.

The possible effects on other wildlife (bats, dragonflies, etc.) were discussed, including who might be able to help, e.g. Giles Sutton (Reading Biodiversity Officer, Mike Turton, Berks Bat Group, etc. TABCG could organise surveys.

Action: RRI to send contact details for people who can help to AH.

Jeremy Davy: the WBC Biodiversity Officer is retiring. He had been a good supporter of the BOC. It was agreed to write to him to and make a presentation. It was not known whether he would be replaced, so it was also agreed to write to the Head of the WBC's planning department to explain the value of what Jeremy had done and the importance of West Berks as a conservation area.

Action: RS, with input from RRI and NB, to write to Jeremy Davy and WBC.

9. Editorial Board Report

RRI gave a verbal report. About half of the species accounts for the 2013 report were done, and the rest were expected within the next few weeks. RRI said that it should be ready by the end of June, for publication in late summer.

One species account writer had already started on the 2014 report. RRI hoped that it would be possible to publish this report by the end of the year.

Two types of help were required. A few more species account writers were required. Help was also needed with editing accounts, as it was very easy to make or miss mistakes. RD, EP and SW volunteered to help.

RRi reported that he had not yet set up the working group to review the collection and management of records, especially electronic access and the role of the annual report. This was because he wanted to resolve the issues concerning the BRC and CR first. The actions from the last committee meeting were therefore ongoing.

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.

10. Non-BRC Events

The Reading Abbey Rotary Club had asked the BOC for a speaker for one of their meetings. EP pointed out that Rotary Clubs would usually be interested in what the BOC does and could be very generous. RRi volunteered to speak at their meeting on 14th July.

Action: SW to contact Reading Abbey Rotary Club.

RRe will be giving a talk on behalf of the BOC to Joan Pearson's Ladies Friendship Group and in May will be talking to East Berks RSPB.

11. Queen Mother Reservoir

The access agreement between Thames Waters and the BOC had now been agreed and signed. It was for three years from the date of signing, 22nd March.

SW had contacted Mike Mckee (MM) about providing health and safety advice to members visiting QMR. Peter Newbound was going to take over MM's role at QMR.

Action: SW & MM to develop QMR safety guidance, for the website and with permits.

12. Reports for consideration

Social Media Update

There was little to report. CF still needed to give RS access so he could post reports when CF was unable to attend meetings.

Action: RS to post information when CF not able to do so.

13. Any Other Business

RD reported that the peregrine box at his company's building in Bracknell appeared to be occupied, as the male had been seen sitting nearby. He will contact their Facilities Manager to try to arrange access.

Action: RD to write item about the peregrines for the BOC website.

SC raised an issue concerning ringing in the Harris Garden, where she is a volunteer. The Head Gardener had not been informed when ringing was being carried out. No warnings were in place and a volunteer had tripped over a guy rope. The nets were also being left unattended, although they should be supervised as they are in a public place.

Action: CF to follow this up with the ringer and to contact the Head Gardener.

14. Dates and venue for next meetings

The dates for the next two meetings are:

Thursday 7th July at 8 pm, Park House, University of Reading.

Thursday 13th October at 8 pm, Park House, University of Reading.

Action: CF/BT to book Park House for both meetings.