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Introduction

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Welcome to the 73rd BOC Newsletter. If this looks very similar to many of the 72 previous Newsletters that Ted Rogers has produced – that’s because I don’t like revolution – anyway, I hope you enjoy it. We all owe Ted tremendous thanks for the sterling work he put in to produce this Newsletter for 20 years; and we should also thank Ray for the enormous amount of material he has contributed to it over the years! I don’t intend to run for 20 years but I’m relieved to say that Ray has promised to continue to provide material. So, he has done us proud again this time around with an enormous bird-themed crossword, designed to fill in between Christmas festivities and New Year revels. Other items are more contemplative and less competitive in some new features. Please feel free to contact me by end March 2018 whether to complain or to provide some material for the next issue that is due out in early April – this is YOUR newsletter.

Conservation Corner

Renton.Righelato@berksoc.org.uk

2017 has been an eventful one for the BOC’s conservation programme, one in which work over a number of years seems to be bearing fruit.

Firstly, after a long planning battle, the application to build a housing estate among one of the UK’s most important Nightingale strongholds, Theale Gravel Pits, was refused. The case put forward by the BOC, together with the Theale Area Bird Conservation Group, was accepted by West Berkshire Council and was material to the Council’s rejection. Thanks to all those members who put in their own objections or signed the petition. If the decision goes to appeal we will continue to fight for the Nightingales.

Secondly, our proposals to have Lea Farm Lake, near Dinton Pastures, and Padworth Lane Gravel Pits designated as Local Wildlife Sites have been accepted and we are now seeking to get other important bird sites, in the Kennet Valley and on the Berkshire Downs, designated.

A few years ago, the BOC was instrumental in setting up Fobney Island Nature Reserve in Reading, with Reading Borough Council, the Environment Agency, Thames Water and the River Conservation Trust. We are now in discussions with the Canal and River trust to establish the gravel workings at Padworth Lane and the associated flooded woodland as a new nature reserve. More of which anon.

Lastly, there are quite a few species of bird whose status in Berkshire is not well understood. The Water Rail is one - not uncommon in winter, but secretive in the breeding season. So in 2016 and 2017 a few hardy surveyors have been on the marshes in the pre-dawn hours in April to count breeding pairs. So far we have covered much of the suitable habitat along the River Kennet and some along the Loddon. We were pleased to find that Water Rails are more numerous in the breeding season than was recorded in Atlas surveys and we will next year extend the survey to cover marshy habitats along the Blackwater and some of the smaller Berkshire rivers.

Next year we also aim to survey Berkshire’s water bodies for breeding grebes; Little Grebes in particular are a cause for concern. We will be asking all members to help by sending in all records of breeding grebes. Indeed, all of our conservation work and surveying relies on volunteers, so if you would like to get involved, do contact me.

The 2017-18 season so far...

BOC outdoor activities kicked off in early September with a number of us joining East Berks RSPB for a trip to Arne. There we had excellent views of the young Ospreys from the release project, as well as a grandstand demonstration of fishing technique by a wild adult. A large flock of Spoonbills was a true spectacle, while such as Ravens, Wheatears and Dartford Warblers added to the variety of a day that turned, shall we say, just a bit damp after lunch.

A couple of weeks later a day trip to Titchfield Haven produced something new for us all, when a white raptor with black markings

flew in. It turned out to be a juvenile Common Buzzard (photo RR) of the Scandinavian form, but it was so strikingly unusual that it really threw us for a time. A drake Eider was on the Solent. The star of the waders was a beautiful immature Ruff (photo RR).



Ruffs by the hundred were the feature of several sites in North Norfolk on the first weekend of October. A small flock of Little Stints, massive flocks of Pink-footed Geese, and Knot, some early Brents, late Curlew Sandpipers, Spotted Redshanks, Cattle Egret and so on... A juvenile Rose-coloured Starling, a Grey Phalarope and a juvenile Red-necked Phalarope (photo RR)

were the real stars here. At Welney, Tree Sparrows greeted us in the car park and Whooper Swans were arriving even as we watched. A flock of 31 Cranes was pretty impressive too. N. B. This trip is to be repeated in 2018.

The BOC coach trip to Dungeness on 22nd October was notable for a lucky gap in the prevailing bad weather. We found a flock of a dozen Great Egrets, two Marsh Harriers, a few late Swallows, a Red-necked Grebe, Little Stints, a Black Redstart, Gannets fishing close in-shore, and a Short-eared Owl which was quartering the shingle 'desert' as we set off for home.



The first outing in November was to Farlington Marshes, but disappointingly the forecast of a stiff northerly wind left just two of us to enjoy huge flocks of waders and wildfowl.

We did a little better for numbers at Little Marlow, on a glorious, sunny morning. An agitated Mistle Thrush guarded his mistletoe berries high above the churchyard and later a small flock of Bullfinches glowed in the sun. The mass off assorted water birds contained a few interesting 'escapes', but also revealed a Yellow-legged Gull and a number of Snipe.

There is a lot more to come this season. Our Outdoor Programme is designed to take birders of all skill levels to places where they can expect to see a variety of birds over the course of a year. That way we introduce people to both sites and birds. There are always enough experienced people in a group to help the less-experienced to develop their skills, but, as the white Buzzard proved, even old hands learn something new almost every time

they go out. Car-sharing and coaches are available for those with no transport, so always check with the designated leader for help.

The Indoor Programme got off to a cracking start, with an excellent presentation by local activist, Jan Stannard about Swift conservation. Jan's enthusiasm was infectious: her concerns had been backed by real action provoked by concern for the damage done to traditional nesting sites by building renovation etc. Jan has intervened, as a member of Swift Conservation (<http://www.swift-conservation.org/>) to work with developers, local authorities and individuals to prevent losses. There is now a team who spend their spare time building Swift boxes to erect wherever there are takers. BOC is considering some follow-up action which will be announced later.



Our second speaker of the season was Professor Tim Birkhead of Sheffield University, author of a number of books treating serious ornithology in a palatable and accessible style. Tim's talk focused on his years of research into Guillemots on Skomer. The rationale, methodology and ecology were all quite fascinating. However, the fact that numbers have been rising steadily has caused the Welsh authorities to withdraw research grants just at the time when there is evidence that sea temperatures are causing changes to the food-fish species and climate change is bringing regular patterns of intense storms that prevent the birds from feeding for days on end. Our speaker fee will be dedicated to furthering that research. Find out more by clicking on the link below. (<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/nr/sheffield-scientist-save-bird-population-1.739683>)

John Eyre is a familiar face at BOC. His talk on the birds of Wallacea included some historical and geographical background and a wealth of wonderful, exotic birds. John is a very lucid commentator, so it was a delightful evening.

Three contributors made the Members' Magazine evening another very satisfying and informative entertainment. Renton Righelato spoke about issues of local conservation, including the latest on the battle to prevent developers from ruining the best Nightingale territory in the County. Mike Turton introduced us to the world of dragonflies and alerted us to the potential arrival of two new species on the back of climate change. David Massie then took us on a gentle cruise around some spectacular corners of Svaalbad, quietly ticking off all his rare avian targets and collecting a pile of bonus points in assorted whale and seal species.

Many of our speakers are among the most informed people on their topics and will be found speaking at major conferences or at events like the Birdfair. Whether scientists, travellers or photographers, they are authoritative and experienced in their own field and we can learn so much from them. The programme offers variety as well as quality and there is a lot more to come this season. All you have to do is turn up and be fascinated.

AGM

Acting chairman Mike Turton ran the BOC AGM on 29 Nov. at which Richard Stansfield was elected as the new chairman. Under the Terms of the Constitution, Dr Rebecca Thomas stood down after three years on the committee and Ken Moore was voted in as replacement. Our thanks to Mike and Becky for their work on the committee.

Neil Bucknell has decided not to stand for re-election as President when his term of office comes to an end in January. Mike thanked him for his long-term support for the BOC. The Committee have appointed Renton Righelato as the new President. Renton is eminently qualified for the post: not only professionally but also as a life-long birdwatcher and through his past and present involvement with the BOC and conservation in Berkshire. Renton said that following Neil would be a very hard act, and the Club owes Neil a great debt to for his work. Neil was thanked by the meeting.

Birding Crossword 3

Across

- 1 Dole-cut breeds disturbance for a cormorant. (6,7)
- 11 Takes only outsized fish? (6)
- 12 Nuthatch – on the nest? (5)
- 14 Bird's cloaca. (4)
- 15 Familiar Bard and E.T for American wader. (6)
- 16 Two of a kind. (4)
- 17 Avian nursery. (4)
- 18 One is long or short in some owls... (3)
- 20 ...and another may be "cerealised" in a passerine! (8)
- 21 It is human to do so, but birds wander regularly off course too. (3)
- 22 The earliest conservationist? (4)
- 24 Sylvia's headgear is black. (3)
- 26 Did this come first or second? (3)
- 27 Initially a computer element- but maybe also our capacity to recognise a bird! (3)
- 28 The Bohemian's cousin. (5)
- 29 Auk's breakfast – detected by scent? (5)
- 30 How the Mallard crossed the water. (7)
- 32 Breeding wild confuses flare. (5)
- 34 Poolside hazard for safari birders, maybe! (5)
- 36 No dawn chorus heard without them. (4)
- 37 The right grub may be Worms (4)
- 38 The Great Black-backed Gull needs this long to mature. (4,5)
- 40 A Quelea in an African harvest, maybe. (4)
- 41 Bunting and crake share a silly sense of humour. (4)
- 42 The Storm Cock, not Mavis. (6)
- 43 Feather, or feather-like leaf structure. (5)
- 44 North American avifaunal region. (8)
- 45 Source of garden food - or user. (6)
- 46 A feeding Phalarope making like a spider? (7)
- 51 Feather deterioration in Northumbria? (4)
- 52 A bunting by Audubon? (7)
- 53 Call the owl Hedwig. Harry does! (5)
- 54 "Taiga" will do these days. (6)
- 55 Trophy for the best nest? (3)
- 56 Often hangs around in braces when game. (8)
- 57 *Vanellus vanellus* onomatopoeically. (6)

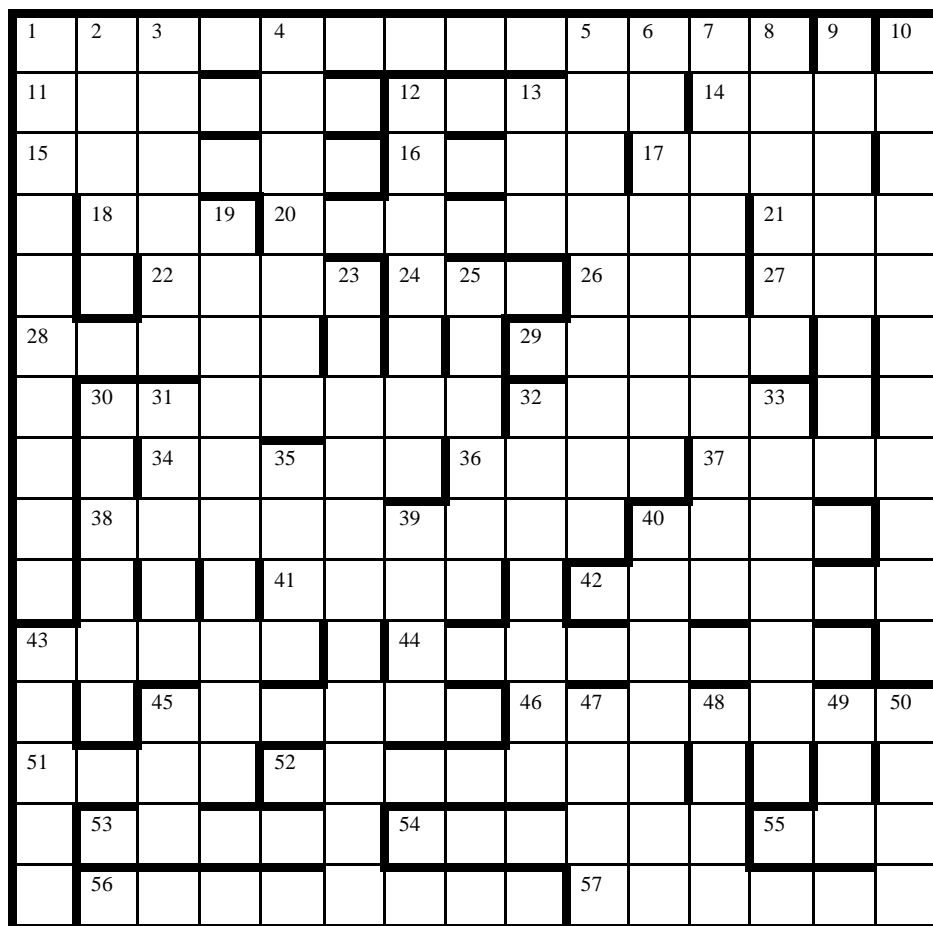
Down

- 1 One of these N.Am. waders spends more than the other, perhaps? (10)
- 2 Beds down in the Somerset Levels, for example. (5)
- 3 High-bred N. American sandpiper? (6)
- 4 The side for draught-free sea watching. (7)
- 5 The Tropicbirds' bad colds are all behind them. (9)
- 6 Sort of sea grant for colourful Americans. (8)
- 7 FA-USA, for wetlands ... (10)
- 8 ... but these African and Asian warblers prefer very dry land. (6)
- 9 The way into the nest cavity may fascinate. (8)
- 10 Tiny sea bird reminds me that the lifeboat needs fuel! (5,6)
- 12 Darwin's origin. (7)
- 13 Simply a member of the *Paridae*. (3)
- 19 N. American cuckoo cousin– a jogger of sorts. (10)
- 23 Good times for a kingfisher. (7,4)
- 25 The Californian almost went west, but this one stays in the south. (6)
- 30 Sounds breathless in pursuit of sand eels. (6)
- 31 But does the N.American woodpecker become a fine oak? (6)
- 32 Globally speaking, where to find Sanders' Gull or Stellar's Sea Eagle. (3,4)
- 33 An angle on the recording of a bird? (7)
- 35 It's a killer when sea-watching. (4)
- 39 Almost Eric's friend, the White-tailed Eagle – old and wise? (4)
- 40 All of the woodpeckers are here. (7)
- 43 N.Am. flycatcher or Oz Magpie Lark. (5)
- 45 A spread tail gets at least one supporter. (3)
- 47 A small N.American "shorebird". (4)
- 48 It may hold a few Egyptian Geese. (4)
- 49 To Parkinson it was the bird from Hull! (3)
- 50 The awed expression of those watching a short falcon? (4)

(The solution will be published in the next Newsletter.)

Birding Crossword 3

Ray Reedman



Membership Matters

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A few members have still to pay their 2017/18 subscription; if you are one of them, and do not wish to renew this year, then please drop me an email.

QMR Permits will soon be posted out to those paid up members who have signed up for them.

Seasons' Greetings....

.... from the BOC Committee to all BOC members; and good birding in 2018.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily representative of those of the BOC or of any of its Committee Members.

