



Berkshire Ornithological Club



Minutes of the Annual General Meeting for 2016

8.00pm 30th November 2016 at Room 109 Palmer Building, University of Reading

The President, Neil Bucknell, in the chair and 42 members present

1. **Apologies for absence:** Sally Wearing, Mike Turton, Chris Foster. The meeting was informed that Sally was unwell. All wished her a speedy recovery.
2. **Minutes of AGM held on 18th November 2015:** the minutes were approved and signed by the President.
3. **Matters arising:** There was one item arising from AOB at the 2015 AGM – a request to add grid references to the programme details. This was done in the 2016-17 programme.
4. **Honorary Treasurer's Report and the Club Accounts:** were presented by Eleanor Pitts and had been reviewed by Phil Caunt. Phil has agreed to review the 2016-17 accounts and the Club is indebted to him for this.

The Treasurer reported that 2015-16 had been a typical year with the exception of two generous donations: £10,000 from Birds of Berkshire Atlas Group and £2,027 from County Ornithological Services. The Club cannot expect similar donations in 2016-17.

One bird report, for 2012, was published. Room hire costs increased and constitute 30% of our total expenditure. Excursion costs are generally met by participants but can make a loss when poorly supported. Gift Aid was claimed and made a significant contribution to income. The Treasurer thanked all members who Gift Aid their subscriptions.

The Treasurer explained that the Club has two funds: the General fund which is unrestricted and the Conservation Fund which is a restricted fund. The usual Club practice of considering all overpayments of subscriptions to be donations to the Conservation Fund was adhered to in 2015-16. This meant that the small surplus on income over expenditure in the General Fund became a small deficit.

The meeting thanked the previous Hon Treasurer Bill Nichol for his support and for being willing to stand in to review the 2015-16 accounts if necessary.

There were no questions and the accounts were accepted unanimously.

5. **Election of Officers:** The Committee proposed the following:
Chairman: Vacant.
Hon. Treasurer: Eleanor Pitts.
Hon. Secretary: Sally Wearing.

The President informed the meeting that there were no nominations for the post of Chairman, so he will again assume the role of acting Chairman and the Committee will work to find a new Chairman.

The Hon. Treasurer and Hon. Secretary were both re-elected unanimously. The meeting thanked Richard Stansfield who had acted as Chairman until his employers posted him abroad. The meeting thanked Eleanor and Sally for the excellent work they do.

6. **Election of Ordinary Members of the Committee:** There were four vacancies on the Committee and four nominations: Andy Horscroft, Adrian Lawson, John Swallow and Jake Bishop. All were proposed and elected unanimously. The meeting thanked Christ Foster, Robin Dryden and Richards Stansfield for their contribution to the Club's Committee.
7. **Report of Chairman and Officers:** The President, Neil Bucknell, presented the Report of Chairman and Officers.

Membership: membership numbers are declining. there are now only 267 members. Members were urged to ensure Iain Oldcorn has their current details and to encourage people to join the Club. Neil thanked Iain for all the work he does as Membership Secretary.

Meetings and Field Trips: Again, the numbers attending both the indoor and outdoor events are falling. This is disappointing and has consequences for the Club e.g. recently trips have had to be cancelled because too few people have shown an interest or because of a lack of volunteer leaders. There is a nucleus of stalwarts who currently act as leaders and they would warmly welcome more people to join them. Neil thanked this group for their valuable contribution.

Neil asked for suggestions about why people do not attend indoor meetings (the last meeting was a fascinating talk and yet was attended by only 40 people) in a venue that "most clubs would die for" and asked what was missing. One member called out "coffee" to which there was amused affirmation from the meeting.

Neil thanked Ray for his sterling work on devising and organising the Indoor and Outdoor programmes.

Annual Reports: The task is continuing; the 2012 report has been published and the 2013 report is at the printers. The process is under review.

New County Recorder: Richard Burness was warmly welcomed and introduced to members.

8. **Conservation Report:** this was presented by Renton Righelato on behalf of the Conservation Committee which he recommended for thanks from the meeting.

The Conservation Fund: has a healthy balance because of the donation of £20,000 over two years. Members can buy a copy of the Atlas for a reduced price of £25 from now until January. The Fund has made a few small donations in 2015-16 and is anticipating larger ones next year.

Advocacy: The Conservation Committee responds to requests for information about mitigation and Planning Applications. Of note is the proposed housing development at Theale which would adversely affect the largest concentration of nightingales in Southern England. Renton reported that Neil's expertise in planning issues has been invaluable in this battle. Currently the planning meeting about the most recent proposal is repeatedly being postponed. Renton believes that if the proposal is rejected it will go to appeal.

Reserves: Fobney Island Nature Reserve is working well. Willow encroachment is a problem. Anyone with a herd of cattle plus ideas about how to deal with willow should contact Renton!

Padworth Lane Gravel Pit: plans are progressing slowly but in the right direction. Support has been gained from the Parish Council.

Farm Surveys: continue at the request of Natural England. This is rewarding work, e.g. where conservation measures have contributed to achieving a field full of corn buntings. Volunteers are urgently needed to support this work, i.e. winter (Dec to Feb, one or two visits to each site) and breeding bird survey (April, May, June).

Water Rail Survey: A few sites had been confirmed as breeding sites so a number of pilot surveys were undertaken. Water rails were found in all but one site. Many surveyors are needed for this task, so members who delight in getting up before dawn to stand in marshy spots in freezing conditions are especially welcome.

The President thanked Renton and all involved in the club's conservation activities. He invited suggestions for how the Conservation Fund might be spent.

9. **Birding highlights of 2015-16**

A summary of the birding highlights of 2015-16, prepared by Ken Moore, was delivered by Renton Righelato. It had been a rather a quiet year for Berkshire. The summary will be published separately.

10. **Any other business:**

It was pointed out that, under the constitution, if this evening's meeting had not been quorate, there might have been a problem in reconvening because the next scheduled meeting is in one week's time.

The President closed the AGM at 8:47pm; this was followed by a talk from Hein van Grouw from the Natural History Museum on Pigmentation of Birds.