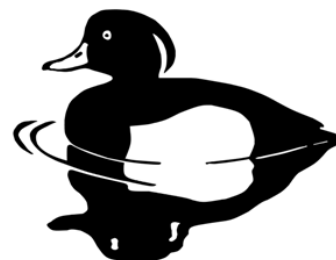


BOC Newsletter

Spring/Easter 2018

No 74



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Introduction

Iain Oldcorn bocmembershipsec@hotmail.co.uk

Welcome to the 74th BOC Newsletter. As well as giving us another update on Conservation issues, Renton is looking for help on monitoring breeding Grebe. Our County Recorder, Richard Burness, describes the working of the Berkshire Records Committee and advises us how to make sure that our submitted records can be accurately reported. Ray gives us another summary of recent indoor and outdoor events and is seeking to organise an additional trip to view the Great Bustard at their UK re-introduction site; and, of course, further down we give you the solution to his giant Xmas crossword. We have the boring matter of complying with new data protection regulations and bring sad news about the GBS but follow this with some stunning shots from the recent BOC PhotoComp. On the last page you will find what I intend to be a regular feature - the Gallery. Please feel free to contact me by end July 2018, whether to complain, or to provide some material (such as your Gallery entry) for the next issue due out in early August – this is still YOUR newsletter.

Conservation Corner

Renton.Righelato@berksoc.org.uk

Firstly, a brief update on some local authority planning issues. The good news is that another of the sites we had proposed as a Local Wildlife Site, Fobney Island, has been officially designated. The bad news is that the decision by West Berkshire Council to reject the proposal for a housing estate on the banks of Theale Main Lake has gone to appeal. To protect the important Nightingale population and the other wildlife around the lake, the BOC, led by Neil Bucknell, will be making representations to the appeal hearing.

Secondly, will you be a Swift Champion? As you probably know, Swifts are struggling in Britain. Their numbers have more than halved in the last twenty years due in part, we believe, to modern building design and refurbishment of old buildings, which often deprives Swifts of their nest sites. We can easily put this right by installing nest boxes when roofs are renovated and including nesting bricks or boxes in new buildings. In many towns across the county, conservation groups and councils are making this happen. Jan Stannard, in her inspiring talk to the BOC last September, explained what Maidenhead is doing; Colin Wilson has a similar project in the Frimley area and several other members have installed their own boxes.



However, in Berkshire generally and Reading in particular, there is extensive demolition, new building and renovation, threatening the Swift population further. The BOC would like to help mitigate the problem by supporting homeowners and developers to create new nest sites. The Birds of Berkshire Conservation Fund is able to provide nest boxes (one of our members has volunteered to construct the boxes) or bricks. Now, their installation at suitable sites is the key. We need a few Swift conservation champions to:

- spot the opportunities for installing nest boxes or nest bricks during renovation or construction work and encourage the site owners to put them in;
- advise and help homeowners who would like to put up boxes.

If you can help make this happen, please contact me by email: renton.righelato@berksoc.org.uk or phone 0787 981 2564.

Lastly, can I draw your attention to our **breeding Grebes survey** (see below). Berkshire is fortunate in having good numbers of Great Crested Grebes, some 3-5% of the national population. However, Little Grebes appear to be declining fast and we do not know why. This simple survey, which anyone can take part in, aims to understand more about their status and habitat requirements. Do please help!

The Reintroduction of the Great Bustard into Wiltshire

Ray Reedman

Last summer Ralph Watts and his pals visited the site where the Great Bustard is being reintroduced into the wilds of Salisbury Plain. This seemed to be a great idea to fill the void of the quiet birding season in July, so Gray, Adrian and I decided to play copycat. In short, we arrived a couple of weeks later for a booked visit.

We parked at a village hall and were collected with 5 others for a Land Rover journey into a hinterland bordering a military area. There we were decanted into a hide facing a steep slope, where - lo and behold! - a flock of eight wild Great Bustards was already waiting. Our guide had been anxious to get us there, as she had earlier seen these birds fly in from further out. The much larger male was a tagged veteran of one of the early releases, but none of the seven hens appeared to be tagged in that obvious way. We watched them for some time as they fed in an area of shorter and longer grass, sometimes disappearing totally as the grasses masked their great bulk. That surprised us a little, as the males are arguably the heaviest flying bird in the world and we had expected them to stand out rather more, but the tawny background of patchy, dry grass stems proved to be a remarkable camouflage.

The release programme has had a fair amount of TV and press coverage. In a nutshell, earlier releases of young birds sourced in Russia did not seem to take well. Birds just disappeared and some suspect that the migratory instincts of that population may have been the problem. Even so, a group of young birds with no experienced adults will not be good at surviving. The remaining birds took time to reach maturity, so any early breeding attempts often failed. Predation was often suspected too. Ten years or so on, the project is still releasing birds - 23 in 2017 - but these are now hatched on-site from eggs sourced from the static population of Spain and are better acclimatised from the start. There are now some mature adults breeding, but monitoring their success in the vastness of Salisbury Plain, where much land is inaccessible to civilians, is nearly impossible. It seems, though, that the project may be turning the corner at last. The Common Cranes have also taken time to establish in the West Country, but the idea that these two large species will become more common is an attractive one.

We had some other bird action too, of course, the most interesting being the interaction of a young Kestrel with an adult Hobby: after a bit of aerial sparring, they landed to search nonchalantly for worms and insects just a few feet from one another in the middle of a field, a most odd sight!

It was a good morning out, so it occurred to me to add the idea to our programme. For more information see their web-site <http://greatbustard.org/>. It is a fifty-mile trip and a car seems essential, so I am prepared to act as a coordinator for anyone who wants to try the trip next July. If you don't have access to a car, someone else may be able to offer a lift, or we may be able to condense three or four people into a car to share costs. The entry ticket costs £15. Of course, a group of friends may not need any organising, but I am prepared to be anchor man to bring cars and lifts together as needed. Several names are already on the list; to contact me Tel 01189864338 or email meander2@hotmail.com.

BOC Breeding Grebes Survey 2018

Renton.Righelato@berksoc.org.uk

The distribution and types of water bodies in Berkshire have changed over the last 50 years, and continue to change, due largely to gravel extraction and subsequent restoration work. Whilst Great Crested Grebe population seems fairly stable, Little Grebes have been declining rapidly.

Great Crested Grebe Although quite common on Berkshire waters, Great Crested Grebes were classed as Vulnerable in a recent analysis (Stanbury *et al*, 2017. *British Birds* **110**, 502-517). The total breeding population in Great Britain is around 9,000 birds, of which Berkshire holds 3-5%. The Atlas (*The Birds of Berkshire*, 2013) shows occupancy to have been stable between 1989 and 2009, with 220-250 pairs recorded in the more recent Atlas surveys. In the 1975 national survey, 40 water bodies in Berkshire were reported occupied and 302-340 birds recorded (*The Birds of Berkshire*, 1996).

Little Grebe The tetrad occupancy of Little Grebes in Berkshire almost halved between the 1989 atlas and 2011, when the population was estimated to be about 50 pairs. Since then, the numbers of records received has been falling, reflecting a national downward trend. The reasons for its decline are unclear.

The objectives of the 2018 survey are:

- 1) to monitor as many water bodies as possible for both Little Grebe and Great Crested Grebe
- 2) to characterise the habitat of occupied and unoccupied water bodies.

Water bodies should be visited from April to mid-June and, if grebes are found, again from mid-June to August. The simple site description form should be completed after the first visit, whether or not grebes are present. You can find the online survey form on the BOC website: <http://berksoc.org.uk/recording/surveys/grebes-survey/>. If you are unable to use the online form, hard copy survey forms can be obtained from Renton Righelato and returned to: BOC Grebe survey, 63 Hamilton Road, Reading, RG1 5RA.



BTO Cuckoo Migration

Richard Stansfield

We started the 2018 indoor programme with a terrific presentation by Phil Atkinson from the BTO who gave us a talk entitled " Tracking Afro-palaearctic migrants to understand population declines". Phil presented a review of the work the BTO does using new tracking technology to understand the migration routes of Cuckoos and Nightingales as they leave the UK and travel to the humid forest regions in Sub-Saharan Africa. The BTO work demonstrates that these migrants are dependent on rainfall patterns in Africa, which have not as yet been affected by climate change, and unlike other UK migrants such as Blackcap, these birds have not changed their arrival times in the UK, potentially putting them at a disadvantage in respect to other more adaptable species. The research carried out by the BTO also demonstrates the value of protected staging areas for migrating birds, particularly those surrounded by agricultural landscapes, and the damage illegal logging in areas like the Congo is doing to wintering habitats for UK migrants.

If you would like to support this important work carried out by the BTO you can sponsor a Cuckoo starting at £12 per year via the BTO website: <https://www.bto.org/science/migration/tracking-studies/cuckoo-tracking>.

Event Reports

Ray Reedman

This summary of our activities picks up where the October report stopped...

Outdoors, the weather was sometimes not kind and did take the shine off one or two of our plans. It was particularly nasty for Farlington and put off most people and those of us who went came home early: the birds were plentiful but we were defeated by a vicious, penetrating wind that cut to the bone. Little Marlow was better, with a good assortment of birds, including a Yellow-legged Gull and a wide variety of other water birds, including some dodgy feral species. Passerines included Bullfinch and Mistle Thrush. The trip to the London Wetland Centre was not well-supported, but those who went saw some interesting species, including a Bittern and Cetti's Warbler. The Christmas Lunch went ahead and was great success, thanks to Carole, but an over-cautious response by yours truly to the threat of freezing fog caused the walk to be cancelled.

The opening walk in January was well-attended, but inhibited by some flooding after heavy rain, but we did manage to locate the Ferruginous Ducks and a few other interesting birds. WWT Slimbridge was a success and was well-supported. This year, there was no freeze-up, so we had a better variety and lots of wildfowl and waders, including Ruff and Little Stint. The Bewick's Swans were joined by an unexpected pair of Whoopers and White-fronted Geese showed well, as did a few Cranes. The trip to Keyhaven/Pennington coincided with heavy rain, but the intrepid leader stuck to the plan, while several of us postponed for a week. That really is a site not to be missed in January, because there were so many exciting birds about. Minsmere was affected by a strong north-easterly that made sea-watching impossible, but we did find a good flock of Snow Buntings on the beach, Bearded Tits in the reeds, a family of Whoopers in the pools, and half a dozen Marsh Harriers. Waders, though, were lacking. I was not in Norfolk, but I hear that they notched up a trip list of 130 species. A more detailed report of that may come later. Twyford Lakes were busy, with a good assortment of wildfowl, a few winter thrushes, a Goldcrest and two Oystercatchers, as well as a pleasant social lunch afterwards.



Indoors, our AGM talk by Mike Lane saw British wildlife through the lens of an expert and gave us a good lesson in how to value the more 'ordinary' species. Mike Leach followed in December with a thoroughly incisive look at hummingbirds through the eyes of another first-class scientist and photographer. January brought a late substitution of our planned BTO speaker by his colleague, Phil Atkinson, a specialist in the electronic tracking of birds, and a talk full of fascinating science. Graham Lenton, another scientist-photographer took us into the deep

snows of Northern Scandinavia for bone-chilling sessions in freezing hides with wonderful views of raptors, owls and Capercaillie. In early Feb, Prof Mark Fellowes, University of Reading discussed the results of his Reading University department's research into the interaction between humans and birds, in particular Red Kites and other urban birds; did you realise how many local residents feed their kites? The postponed talk by Alex Kacelnik was worth waiting for. Never again will we use the term 'bird-brain' as an insult. Alex had us agog with wonder as he took us through demonstrations of just how bright some crows and cockatoos can be. The Photographic Competition was, as usual, heavily contested. See the web site for the winners and the pictures. Colin Wilson has run this for years, and now wants to step down. (Any takers? We need help with that!) Most of all, we must give a huge vote of thanks to Colin for a great job.

There are still two talks to come, and a lot more going on outdoors, so we hope to see you there. Meanwhile, Sue Charnley already has a superb Indoor Programme lined up for next year and I thank her warmly for taking on a job that I have enjoyed enormously. I hope it gives her as much pleasure and reward.

Berkshire Records Committee

Richard Burness

The Berkshire Records Committee (BRC) is tasked with the review and adjudication of descriptions submitted to support records of rare or scarce species reported in the county.

As of January 2018, the committee members are: Derek Barker, Adrian Hickman, Andy Horscroft, Ken Moore and Hugh Netley. All these should be familiar names and faces to anyone who goes birding in Berkshire.

Richard Burness (County Recorder) remains non-voting committee convenor and is currently acting secretary.

As a result of restructuring, Peter Standley, Robin Dryden and Chris Heard will no longer be members of the BRC. They are thanked sincerely for their valuable contribution to the recording process. We hope that they will now make themselves available in an advisory capacity, taking on investigative reviews outside the remit of the BRC.

All of the above freely give, or have given, their time and expertise to support birding and the recording process in Berkshire. However, the process is not just the Recorder, the Database Manager and the BRC. All the birders who submit their records play their part. So, we ask that you help us by ensuring that records of rare or scarce species are accompanied by the appropriate level of supporting evidence. On the Recording page of the BOC web site: <http://berksoc.org.uk/recording/submitted-records/> you can find a list of species, and a rare record report form. Records should be sent to records@berksoc.org.uk or through your usual medium. Unsupported records make the task of validation difficult for the Recorder and the BRC; unfortunately, there are an increasing number of records from single observers or single groups reporting scarce species without providing the supporting evidence. In these circumstances the BRC will, reluctantly, have no option but to reject the records.

You are now able to follow the progress of your records on the berkbirds web site. Simply go to <http://www.berkbirds.co.uk/recordsworkingprogress.asp>. You will find a list of rare or scarce species that have been reported during the past few years. The table shows the date, the species and a code indicating the current status of the record. The status of records is continually updated by either the Recorder or the Database Manager.

Location, Location, Location

Richard Burness

When it comes to the analysis of records in the database there are several parameters that are critical to the integrity and value of each record. What species is it? How many were there? Were they calling, singing, nesting? Who saw it? *Where is it?* The last question seems simple and obvious. However, there are a surprising number of database errors attributable to spatial misplacement which lessen the value of the records in question.

We are requesting that when you submit your records the site names you use are as precise as possible. **The ideal record would have a site name taken from an OS map near to the location accompanied by a six-figure grid reference giving the exact location of the bird.** Birds reported from popular sites, such as Lower Farm GPs or Hosehill LNR will automatically have a four-figure grid reference allocated by the database but a six-figure reference will still be helpful. Town or village names should only be used for records in the urban area, for example "Thatcham" is not an alternative for "Thatcham Marsh" or "Thatcham GPs". Vague site definitions cause problems. "The Ridgeway", "The K & A Canal" or "Drift Road" reduce the worth of a record because each of these "sites" stretch many miles and cross county boundaries. Of course, the ideal isn't always possible. If you are submitting records electronically, either on an Excel spreadsheet or through *Birdtrack*, then you can use the notes and remarks columns to qualify the location. It is also worth noting that many smart phone map apps enable you to read out grid references or GPS co-ordinates.

Some of the database problems are caused by duplication of entry. These occur when a site has several different names. It is impossible to eliminate duplicates altogether but using the name in commonest usage would help. (As an example, observers reporting the same bird as being at Eversley GPs, Moor Green Lakes or Yatley GPs will find their observations entered as three separate individual birds in the database.)

Finally make sure that the bird is in Berkshire! You'd be surprised at how many records for Surrey, Oxon and Bucks end up in our database. The main problem occurs with records entered through *Birdtrack*, which resolves records to 10km squares. (In a recent case birds seen at Greys Court in Oxfordshire were allocated to Greys Court in Reading.) Again, the answer is to be as precise as possible.

GDPR – Boring But Necessary – Everybody's Doing It

Iain Oldcorn

Like all other UK organisations who collect and process personal data, the BOC must comply with the General Data Protection Regulation by 25th May 2018. So.... Sally, Eleanor and I met to agree how this should best be done and then sent our recommendations to the full BOC Committee who are considering them. We will advise existing members of the final details by separate email or with the annual August mailing to all members; future new members will be told of it when they join us.

The basic approach will be documented in a Privacy Notice (PN) which will be published on our website together with any associated documentation. The basis is that we need certain items of the personal data of each member (e.g. Name and Contact Details) solely for membership purposes, for example in order to be able to communicate with them and so that they may benefit from their BOC membership. Members may opt-out from the BOC holding this information but thereby will effectively render their membership rather meaningless.

The Club does not provide personal data to anyone who does not have a legitimate reason for accessing it. No personal data is ever provided to third parties without the explicit permission of the individuals involved.

The PN will be reviewed regularly and updated when appropriate; members will be advised of any changes.

For non-compliance with the GDPR, we could be fined up to £17 million or 4% of our global turnover – whichever is higher! 😊

BOC Garden Bird Survey

Ted Rogers

The BOC Garden Bird Survey (GBS) has been running for over 20 years but, sadly, the number of returns has now declined to the point where it is no longer viable. For the last winter period of 2016/17 there were only 7 returns - one of which was my own! So reluctantly the decision has been taken to end the survey, and so forms for the next period (Summer 2018) will not be sent out to all members as before. I have to accept some of the blame for this decline as I have failed, over my years of ownership, to provide any real feedback and data analysis to the Club and its members, and hence perhaps little incentive for people to take part. If you are busy completing this winter's form please continue to do so and I will add them to my backlog. I should add, at this stage, special mention of John Farnsworth who did sterling work when he was looking after the survey before me and (unlike myself) did provide good analysis of the data gathered.

Many of you will know that the BTO run a much larger (and hence more viable) garden bird survey (Garden BirdWatch), and indeed some BOC members already take part. I suggest that if you want to continue to provide garden bird data that you apply to take part in the BTO survey, although I should warn you that you will need to pay their annual subscription fee (currently £17). Needless to say, the BTO are much better at doing the required analysis of the data they receive and their web site holds all sort of analysis about garden birds across the country (including Berkshire, although this is split into our six Unitary Authorities –Reading, Windsor and Maidenhead, Slough, Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire and Wokingham). Details of the BTO Garden BirdWatch, including how to join, are available on the BTO web site at www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/gbw.

Although the BOC survey is finishing it is my intention to produce a report covering all the years of the BOC Garden Bird Survey, which will at least provide a view as to how well or badly some of our garden birds have done over that period and, I suspect, how increased bird feeding in gardens has affected garden bird behaviour and feeding habits.

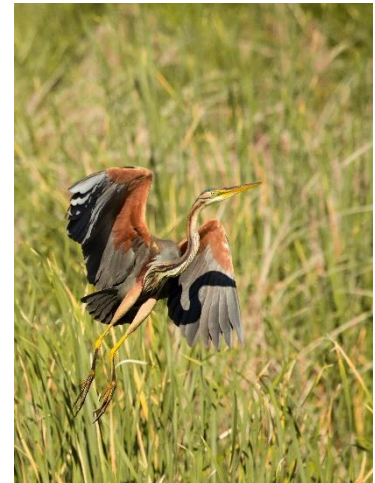
Can I end by thanking all those people who have taken part in the GBS over the years and hope that you will continue to enjoy the birds that you see in your gardens. I know that some people do really enjoy recording what they see and if you would like to continue to receive the forms I will email them to you for your personal use – please let me know.

BOC Photo Competition 2018

Colin Wilson

These images are some of the finalists of the 2018 BOC Photographic Competition; over 130 images were submitted for judging. You can see what a high standard we saw on the night and the difficulties the judges, Ashley Grove and Mary Braddock, had in choosing winners.

Included in the finalists: Nils provided the Salvin's Albatross. Brian Winter achieved this great shot of a Red Grouse. Bill Watts entered this splendid Razorbill and Ewan Jones captured a Purple Heron in flight.



However, the runners up were: Portrait - Martin Musselwhite's Stonechat, Action - Dave Rimes' Sanderling and in Flight - Nils Bouillard had this atmospheric Australian Gannet.



Finally the winners were: Portrait – John Absolom's beautiful Dunlin, Action - Martin Musselwhite produced this amazing shot of Avocets chasing off an Osprey and in Flight – we had Ken White's fabulous Black Headed Gull.



John's Dunlin was voted winner of the Gordon Langsbury Memorial Trophy.

So, start shooting for next year and get your name on the trophy!

Birding Crossword 3 – Solution

Ray Reedman

1 D	2 O	3 U	B	4 L	E	C	R	E	5 S	6 T	7 E	8 D	9 E	10 S
11 O	S	P	R	E	Y	12 S	I	13 T	T	A	14 V	E	N	T
15 W	I	L	L	E	T	16 P	A	I	R	17 N	E	S	T	O
I	18 E	A	19 R	20 W	H	E	A	T	E	A	R	21 E	R	R
T	R	22 N	O	A	23 H	24 C	25 A	P	26 E	G	G	27 R	A	M
28 C	E	D	A	R	A	I	N	29 S	M	E	L	T	N	P
H	30 P	31 A	D	D	L	E	D	32 F	E	R	A	33 L	C	E
E	U	34 C	R	35 O	C	S	36 E	A	R	S	37 D	I	E	T
R	38 F	O	U	R	Y	39 E	A	R	S	40 P	E	S	T	R
S	F	R	N	41 C	O	R	N	E	42 M	I	S	T	L	E
43 P	I	N	N	A	N	44 N	E	A	R	C	T	I	C	L
E	N	45 F	E	E	D	E	R	46 S	47 P	I	48 N	N	49 E	50 R
51 W	5 E	A	R	52 P	A	I	N	T	E	D	I	G	M	A
E	53 S	N	O	W	Y	54 B	O	R	E	A	L	55 C	U	P
E	56 P	H	E	A	S	A	N	T	57 P	E	E	W	I	T

Membership Matters

Iain Oldcorn bocmembershipsec@hotmail.co.uk

A few members have still not paid their 2017/18 membership subscription and our Treasurer has written to them. If they do not renew their subscription then this will be their last communication from the BOC; and if all of them renew then we will just have maintained membership numbers this year, but after several years of slowly declining numbers it seems likely that the downward trend will continue this year.

The BOC committee are reviewing all options open to us to help bring the club's revenue more in line with our expenditure and thus release more money for conservation activities. This is a lengthy process; more details will be given when available.

If you change your postal or email address please remember to advise me so that we can maintain contact with you; your email address is particularly important to us as using it costs us virtually nothing and is so easy.

Disclaimer

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

Gallery

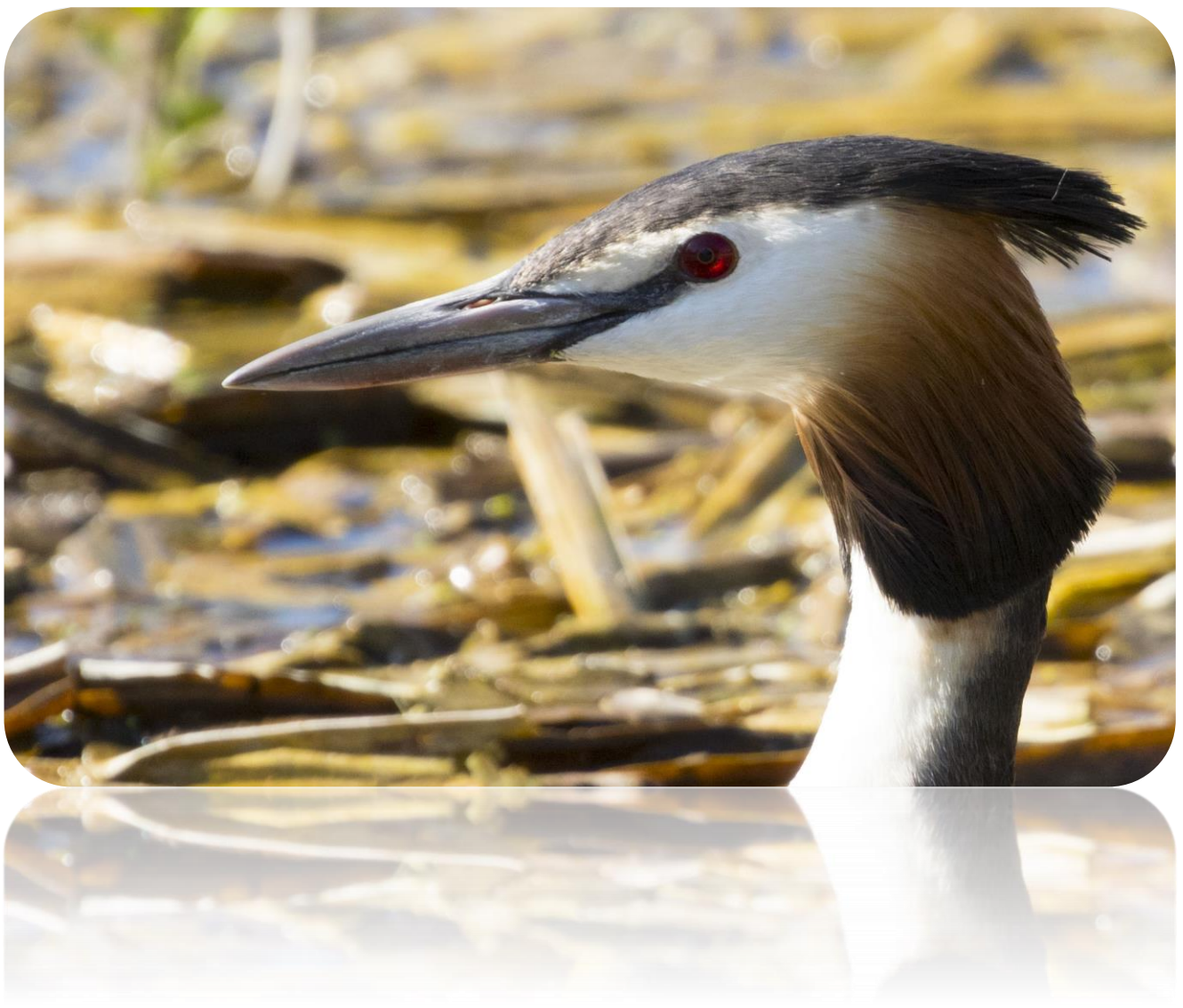
All photographs © Ewan Jones



Brambling/Lavells



Tern/Dinton



Grebe/Dorney