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Introduction

Iain Oldcorn bocmembershipsec@hotmail.co.uk

Welcome to the 75th BOC Newsletter. Renton is still looking for help on monitoring breeding Grebe while our BTO reps Ken and Sarah White encourage participation in a Tawny Owl survey. Next, Chris Wadham alerts us to efforts to help clean up Aldabra in the Indian Ocean while Lisa Jones explains her UK garden birds research; both these contributors would welcome your help in their work. Derek Barker and Richard Burness remind us that the welfare of the birds must always come first before Richard describes a “description”. Ray gives us another summary of recent outdoor trips covering Wishmoor, Farmoor, Rutland Water and Padworth - plus the special trip to view Great Bustard at their UK re-introduction site; and further down we give you his latest Wordsearch. You probably have the Annual Report of Birds of Berkshire for 2010 and 2011 - Sally tells how you can bid for a matching cover painting. I bring you an update on our approach to GDPR, advise you of a proposed Constitution change and make two pleas! On the last page another Gallery. Enjoy - the next issue is due out in early December.

Conservation Corner

Renton.Righelato@berksoc.org.uk

All records of birds extend our knowledge of Berkshire's avifauna, but systematic surveys are fundamental to understanding distribution, abundance and habitat preferences. This year we finished a breeding **Water Rail** survey, the results of which will be published in 2019.

My thanks to the many people have contributed to the ongoing survey of breeding Grebes. There is still time to put in your records of breeding **Great Crested** and **Little Grebes**. Whilst Great Crested Grebes have been doing well in the county, Little Grebes seem to have been declining and we are trying to understand what is happening. We are seeking information about all water bodies, whether or not they have breeding grebes; go to <http://berksoc.org.uk/recording/surveys/grebes-survey/> – to fill in the short questionnaire.

Upcoming surveys include **Tawny Owls**, for which the BTO is seeking volunteers for this Autumn (see below) and a **Willow Tit** survey in Spring 2019, for which we will be seeking volunteer surveyors this Winter.

The BOC's **Swift nest box** scheme has got off to a good start, with Bob Hulley's help in making five-star Swift accommodation. Thanks also to Ken White who has offered help with installation if needed. There are nearly 20 boxes installed or on order for sites around Newbury, Reading and elsewhere. We would like to get 50 nest boxes up in time for next year's arrival at the end of April. So, if you have a suitable site to which there is a reasonable chance of attracting Swifts, do please contact me.

Some of you may have been disturbed by newspaper reports of **culling of Ravens** under licenses issued by Natural England in a number of counties, including Berkshire. We expressed our concern at the killing of this iconic corvid, still a very scarce breeding species here. N.E. assured us that there is only one extant license in the country and we understand that this is not operative in Berkshire; the full response can be seen by following the link from: <http://berksoc.org.uk/news/raven-culling/>

BTO Tawny Owl Point Survey Update 8 Aug 2018

Ken and Sarah White

The BTO's core monitoring schemes suggest a recent decline in Tawny Owls, but as they are daytime surveys, they do not give a full picture for this species.

A new BTO Tawny Owl Survey starts on the 15th August and has 113 surveying squares within a 25 mile radius of Reading available and 61 in BTO Berkshire. Our thanks for the 23 that have to date been taken and allocated, however there are still **14 priority tetrad squares available**, and a further 24 lower priority squares up for grabs.

We need as many of these surveyed as possible please, and the methodology for this new survey is **very easy** and very straight forward; it is a point count from as near [within 300m] the centre of a tetrad [2kmx2km square] as possible. Start the 1st count from the chosen point for 10 mins and then immediately start a 2nd count for 10 mins from the same point. This means that a couple of tetrads could easily be completed in the same evening. The survey is open to anyone who would like to take part.

The first survey period will run from 15th Aug to 15th Oct, 2018. During this time, we ask you to make ideally at least two evening visits to your chosen tetrad in as short a period as possible [2 to 4 weeks]. The process is planned to be repeated between mid-February and mid-March 2019. The BTO Berkshire tetrads are in three blocks centred on: Thatcham/Tadley, Wokingham/Sandhurst and Windsor. Please check the tetrads available in your area and sign up to survey one of them at: <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/project-owl/tawny-owl-point-survey>

The calls of Tawny Owls are distinctive and well known so this survey is suitable for those new to bird surveys as well as experienced surveyors. The resources page of the website has a number of recordings to listen to as practice: <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/project-owl/tawny-owl-point-survey/survey-resources>

In addition, there will be a Tawny Owl Calling Survey between September and March – see the same webpage. Please contact us if you have any queries: btoberks.ken.sarah@gmail.com

The Aldabra Clean-Up Project

Chris Wadham

I've been very lucky and become part of the Aldabra Clean-Up Project – a conservation project aiming to remove hundreds of tonnes of plastic waste from the otherwise pristine Aldabra coral atoll in the Indian Ocean. The Aldabra atoll in the Outer Seychelles is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is home to the world's largest surviving population of giant tortoises as well as a range of endemic bird species and pristine coral reef ecosystems.



Photo credit: Seychelles Islands Foundation



The project has been planned for February-March 2019 and we are currently fundraising in order to try and make the concept a reality. Our target is £150,000, and we have already raised £65,000 in around two months, with more potential donors interested. Having people follow the project on Facebook or Twitter increases our reach and makes it easier for us to attract additional funders.

Information about the project can be found on our crowdfunding page: <https://spsr.me/BFfi> and on our website: <https://www.queens.ox.ac.uk/aldabra>. Regular updates are posted on our Facebook and Twitter pages: <https://www.facebook.com/AldabraCleanUp/> and <https://twitter.com/AldabraCleanUp>

Aldabra is a highly photogenic place and many beautiful photos and stories are shared on these pages. Please help us reach our funding target.

Shifting Baseline Syndrome Research

Lisa Jones

I am a PhD student in Conservation Biology at the Institute of Zoology (ZSL), Royal Holloway College, London working alongside the British Trust for Ornithology. I am running an online survey investigating the importance of UK garden birds in our daily lives, our connection to nature and how accurately we, as a public, can recognise trends in bird populations.

The primary focus of my PhD is in understanding how the relationship of knowledge, experience and our connection to nature impacts our perceptions of ecological change through a social phenomenon called Shifting Baseline Syndrome. This syndrome results in the forgetting of past conditions over time, so we cannot accurately perceive change, thus potentially limiting conservation success. UK garden birds are therefore a perfect case study for my research and I hope to use my research to inform conservation management on a variety of scales.

It would be fantastic to have your voice as a BOC member heard in my research by completing my on-line questionnaire at my website: <https://lizziejones42.wixsite.com/lizziejones/online-questionnaire>

Many thanks in advance for your help.

(ZSL is incorporated by Royal Charter. Principal Office England. Company Number RC000749.)

Don't Forget the Birds!

Derek Barker and Richard Burness

We have such a close involvement with the recording process that we can get mired in the technicalities of it all. Our overwhelming concerns become the scientific integrity of the records and the value of each sighting. This concern is then communicated to observers through the notes and newsletters published on the county's various forums. It is no wonder, then, that we sometimes forget about the objects of our interest (and desires and obsessions!). We forget about the birds! The old mantra "the welfare of the bird comes first" is as relevant now as it ever was, perhaps even more so. Birds as species and populations are under tremendous pressure. Loss of habitat, persecution and the unknowns of climate change are just a few of the dangers they face every day. It is up to us, then, to consider our impact on birds as *individuals*. They suffer enough stress in their lives without us adding more.

Our behaviour in the field must be impeccable:

- don't risk flushing the bird by getting closer to obtain that "crippling" view or that ultimate camera shot
- whilst you are looking for a specific bird, consider the impact that you are having on both the immediate habitat and other species that may be present
- keep well clear of nesting birds and potential breeding sites
- don't distract birds during the breeding season by playing recordings of songs or calls
- don't disturb roosting birds, especially in winter when energy conservation is critical
- please comply with all site access restrictions.

The intent of publishing this note is not to spoil everyone's birding days by applying rules and regulations but it is to remind us that we derive a great deal of pleasure from birds and that we have responsibilities towards them that we should not forget. We can't do much about large scale threats except campaign and lobby, but we *can* exercise control over our own behaviour towards individual birds which will lessen their stress.

What's a Description?

Richard Burness

The Berkshire Records Committee (BRC) examines all records that involve scarce species, unusual dates and unusually large counts that are accompanied by descriptive notes. Unfortunately, a substantial number of records have to be omitted from the database and annual systematic lists due to a lack of supporting descriptions.

The BRC are currently reviewing records for 2016 in preparation for the annual report for that year. I would appeal to all observers who reported rare or scarce species in 2016 to submit their descriptions through records@berksoc.org.uk as soon as possible.

We make this appeal recognising that some observers will be unclear as to exactly what is entailed when we ask for a description. Firstly, the BRC are not here to pass judgement on your knowledge and abilities. We are here to contribute our own skills and experience towards the validation of records. What we want from you in plain English

is what you saw or didn't see on a particular bird that led you to identify it as you did. We are uninterested in whether or not you are an expert on avian anatomy and biology, so we are quite happy for your description to avoid technical (and probably half-understood) terms. Just tell us what you saw!

What we'd like to know:

- The overall size and shape compared to other birds. Including the size and shape of the bill
- The colours and patterns of the plumage on the head, back, tail, wings and underparts
- The bird's behaviour whilst you were watching it
- A description of the call or song
- Finally, what were the particular points above that made you identify it as you did?

These basics should be accompanied by date, time, location, weather, optics used and anything else considered pertinent. A good quality photograph, if available, will also expedite the validation process.

Below is a sample description of a White Stork that was accepted by the BRC*:

Watched from c400 yds, it could be seen striding along the Loddon streamside, occasionally dipping for food items. The legs had a high back-action, coming up quite near the underside as it walked, and its head had a nodding action as it did so. On the odd occasion it found something to eat, its head would be thrust backwards to propel the food down the gullet. It seemed to be in adult plumage.

Large, Heron-sized bird, though with shorter neck. General appearance – white with black wingtips.

Head – white, with black eye 'smudge'.

Bill – stout, long, deep pinkish-red.

Neck – white.

Back, sides, under-parts – white.

Wings – white, with black tips when folded whilst walking.

Legs – long, and bright red/pink.

Here, the observer has written exactly what he saw and what led him to identify the bird as he did. The BRC concurred with his identification. You will note that he managed to describe his sighting without reference to obscure feather tracts or other parts of a bird's anatomy. This is all that we expect.

*Thanks to Brian Clews for allowing us the use of his description.

Auction of Annual Report Artworks

Sally Wearing: secretary@berksoc.org.uk

Robert Gillmor is a long-standing member of the BOC and he generously donates a painting for the cover of each Birds of Berkshire annual report. Each painting is unique and relevant to the specific report. Robert wants the Club to benefit from the paintings, so we are auctioning two of the original artworks and the proceeds will go to the Club's conservation fund.



The paintings are "Oystercatchers", from 2010, and "Roseate Tern", from 2011 and they will be sold separately by a sealed bid auction and only BOC members can bid. The reserve price for each picture is set low at £250 to encourage bidding. They will be on display at the BOC indoor meetings in October and November. The bids will be opened at the BOC AGM on Wednesday 28th November 2018.

All bids must be in a sealed envelope and include the name and contact details of the bidder, and the value of the bid. You must write on the outside of the envelope only the name of the picture which the bid is for. All bids must reach me by 8pm on Wednesday 28th November.

You can give your bids to me, Renton Righelato (President) or Eleanor Pitts (Treasurer) at an indoor meeting or post them to me at: **BOC Secretary, 9 Deans Farm, The Causeway, Reading, RG4 5JZ.**

BOC Field Trips: Spring/Summer 2018

Ray Reedman

What a strange season it has been! Our March outings to Twyford Lakes and Wishmoor were relatively uneventful, though the former was notable for an Oystercatcher already exploring breeding territory. At least we avoided the 'beast from the east' on both dates, though a good many of us recorded winter thrushes in the garden during those two bitter spells.

A deceptive and precocious burst of hot weather in late April confused both birds and bird-watchers, but an earlier planning oversight on my part forced a postponement of the Farmoor walk and some missed the announcements. (Sorry folks!) The replacement date was the last Sunday of April and it came as a shock to find that we needed full winter gear at the reservoir. However, I know from past experience that 'bad' conditions at that time of year can bring down large numbers of hirundines, swifts and terns and on this occasion the spectacle was amazing: as we walked along the causeway, clouds of Swallows, Sand Martins, House Martins and Swifts whirred past our heads. There were literally thousands of them, with the odd mixed groups resting on the wall in perfect pose to show off their differences. Common Terns were there for sure, but the murky conditions made it difficult to be sure of the probable Arctic Terns. Pied and Yellow Wagtails, three wader species and Red-crested Pochard were among our other finds until we reached the river-side reserves, where we found almost all possible warblers, including the song of an unseen Grasshopper Warbler. A Kingfisher put on a good display too.



It was hard to realise, just six days later, that early May could be so beautiful: we were now walking around the Lyndon reserve at Rutland Water in shirt-sleeves. The Ospreys performed beautifully, Tree Sparrows were at the feeders, and we were regaled by warblers of several species. It was idyllic. When we moved to Egleton after lunch, it seemed that our luck really was in, since a Black-winged Stilt had turned up and it was showing well. Eight Wood Sandpipers, five Whimbrels, a Little Ringed Plover and several other waders were the supporting cast. It was a perfect day to tour the hides and, for once, to experience the site without the Birdfair.

In June, the evening walk on the Downs was a quiet affair, but a very pleasant evening and perfect for a gentle walk. There were few open areas among the tall crops, but on one newly-harrowed expanse we found a few hares, rabbits, a fox and some Red-legged Partridges. A few warbler species were still singing in the hedgerows (though for the Willow Warbler it was a single quiet phrase), but several Corn Buntings performed particularly well.

The Nightjar walk at Padworth at the end of the month produced a supporting cast of such as Little Grebes and Buzzard and some unusual beetles etc. but we had just glimpses of a Woodcock as it passed behind a row of trees and a short view of a Nightjar flying against the open sky.



The visit to the Great Bustard Project in Wiltshire was enjoyed by a dozen people in two groups visiting on consecutive days. As the second party drove into the site, a flock of more than twenty of these huge birds was visible foraging on the next hillside and they had also been seen there the day before. From the hides we saw several more individuals much closer. These included a female with a part-grown chick: she was a released four-year-old which had returned to nest close to the release area. Apparently only one chick normally survives, so her



second egg had been removed and hatched successfully ready for later release to join the 70 or so birds which still survive in the wild. Whinchats, Linnets and Corn Buntings were bonus sightings for both groups.

I did not get manage to attend all the events, so this account only tells of some of our activities and successes. There is no Birdfair coach this year, but it is back in the programme for the new season, one of about 24 events planned for the 2018-19 cycle. The first one of these is only a month away. Do take advantage of some of these opportunities and do keep an eye on the web-site and email news just in case we have to change plans.

My thanks as always to all the leaders who make the efforts on your behalf to deliver a wide range of activities. We need some new blood, so if you could organise a walk or lead a trip, do let me know.

(Great Bustard photo by: Andrej Chudý from Slovakia under Wikipedia license CC-BY-SA-2.0)

WordSearch

Ray Reedman

C	T	R	E	P	P	I	D	N	A	O	M	P	Find the names of 16 resident British birds in the grid. Names may intersect or cross-over one another, and run forwards, backwards or diagonally up or down, but always in a straight unbroken line.
R	N	J	E	E	E	R	E	R	I	G	E	R	
M	A	N	P	T	A	R	M	I	G	A	N	I	
Y	R	V	H	Y	W	R	E	D	D	O	M	P	
N	O	R	E	H	Y	E	R	G	A	E	P	A	
O	M	H	A	N	Y	E	L	R	R	V	R	V	
C	R	N	S	I	S	K	I	N	T	I	A	O	
H	O	I	A	H	J	O	N	W	E	R	N	C	
N	C	O	N	B	A	O	N	A	G	P	I	E	
I	B	I	T	T	E	R	N	P	I	B	I	T	

Membership Matters

Iain Oldcorn bocmembershipsec@hotmail.co.uk

2018/19 membership subscription are due on 1 October; those of you paying by Standing Order or other regular banking services can probably relax as you will not need to do anything. Those of you who do not receive email communications from us will find a printed Renewal Form with this postal mailing. I will contact those of you who do communicate via email and use other payment methods during September to remind you to pay soon.

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.

GDPR Again

Shortly after the last Newsletter went to press, the BOC’s approach to the introduction on 25 May 2018 of the new General Data Protection Regulations was approved by the Committee together with the relevant Legitimate Interests Assessment (LIA) and Privacy Notice (PN). Both documents will be reviewed annually by the Committee and you will be advised if any changes are made. Those members on email have already received their copy of the LIA and PN; other members will have received it with the other printed material which accompanies this Newsletter. Our approach meant that members did not need to take any action provided that they were comfortable with our methodology.

BOC Revenue and Annual Subscriptions v BOC Constitution

If we are to maintain (or better still, increase) our direct expenditure on conservation we need to maintain (or better still, increase) our revenue and as membership numbers are drifting down we need to halt the decline and/or increase our annual subscription rates.

As a first step, rather than simply increasing our subs, we propose to reduce the impact of the “retired concession”; many organisations similar to the BOC have already eliminated their equivalent age-related discounts. As this discount is enshrined in our Constitution, the Committee will table a motion at the next AGM on 28 November to withdraw it from our Constitution thus making it unavailable for future retirees. The good news is that those who are already taking advantage of this discount will continue to be able to pay at their current lower rate – though we would be most grateful if they volunteer to pay the full rate in future. At present 134 members pay at the retired rate and if they all gave it up our subscription income would increase by about £575 and we would also claim around £145 extra Gift Aid from HMRC.

The other good news is that the £2 annual reduction for those choosing to pay by Standing Order (STO) is not affected by this proposal; if you wish to pay future subs by STO, or alter the amount of STO that you pay, then please complete a Renewal Form and return it to me and we will liaise with your bank. If you received this Newsletter through the post then a form would have been included with it, alternately a link to the form may be found on our website at: <http://berksoc.org.uk/about/club-membership/>

Thank You!

Request for PR Assistance

We currently have a vacancy on the Committee for an additional member with special responsibility for helping with publicity and maintaining recruitment.

Over the last few years membership levels have been slowly drifting down and we rarely manage to get the message outside our existing members about what we do or what indoor and outdoor events we are running. If you would like to help with this particular aspect of the BOC then please contact our President, Renton (Renton.Righelato@berksoc.org.uk) or our Secretary, Sally (secretary@berksoc.org.uk); if you already have PR experience then that would be terrific.

Will/Bequests

Richard Stansfield

We live in times when birds and other wildlife are under threat as never before. The BOC is striving hard to make a difference and you can help us do so; a legacy to the BOC, of whatever size, will help us continue our practical and advocacy work for birds in Berkshire. This vital work focuses on three key areas:

- 1) Our reports and atlases monitor and map the abundance and distribution of birds in Berkshire and track how these are changing under pressure from land use and climate change
- 2) Conservation work within Berkshire ensures important sites in the county such as Fobney Island and Lower Kennet gravel pits are protected and sympathetically managed
- 3) Publicity and advocacy work, for example regarding development of Theale gravel pits, ensures that all relevant environmental consequences are considered in the planning processes.

Please remember the BOC in your Will and so ensure that your support for our birds is continued.

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 © as credited



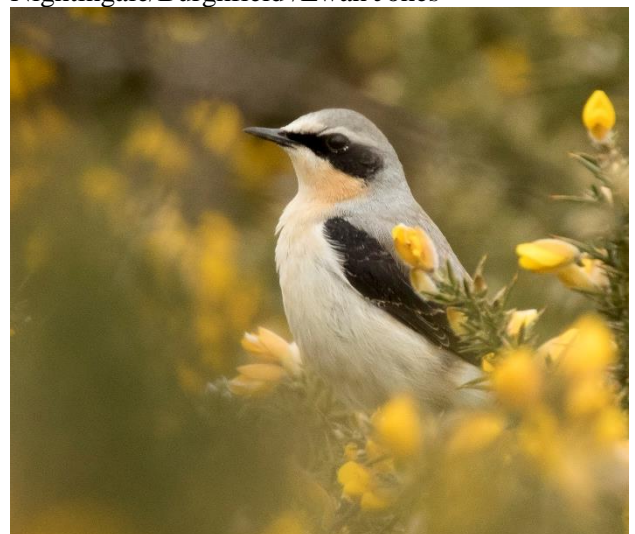
Grey Wagtail/Fobney/Ewan Jones



Skylark/Dorney Wetland /Ewan Jones



Nightingale/Burghfield /Ewan Jones



Wheatear/Greenham Common/Ewan Jones

Starlings/DorneyWetland/Iain Oldcorn