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Introduction

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Welcome to the 76th BOC Newsletter. Renton brings us up to date on the status of our Conservation funds, describes progress on creating new sites to encourage breeding Swift and highlights our surveys on bird species in difficulty. Richard Burness makes a plea on behalf of better recording of Cat 2 & 3 species, encourages us to look out for ringed BH Gulls and remind us what the BRC does. Ray gives us another summary of recent outdoor trips covering Titchfield, Portland/Radipole, North Norfolk, and Rainham Marshes – interspersed with local walks round Reading and the Jubilee River. Further down Ray gives us the solution to the last issues’ Wordsearch and then breaks out from Wordsearches into Anagrams! On the last page another Gallery. Enjoy - the next issue is due out in April 2019.

Conservation Corner

Renton.Righelato@berksoc.org.uk

Thanks to the generosity of members who have donated to our Conservation Fund and to the Atlas Group that has donated the proceeds of sales of the 2013 *Birds of Berkshire* Atlas and Avifauna, the fund now stands at over £30,000. In the last year, small grants have been made for winter feeding of finches and buntings, for a feeding station at Lower Farm, Newbury, for plans for the proposed Padworth Lane Lake Nature Reserve and for Swift nest-boxes.

Our Swift nest-box programme is well on its way to meet its target of 50 by next spring, with boxes going to sites in and around Thatcham, Newbury and Reading, including, thanks to Ailsa Claybourn, six at Kendrick School. We do not want to stop at 50, so, if you have or know of suitable sites, please contact me. The boxes are best placed high on north facing walls or under eaves, in areas where screaming parties of Swifts are found, suggesting that there are birds nesting nearby. The boxes are easiest to install when a building is scaffolded, so if there is work going on somewhere you know, ask them if they would like to help Swifts by putting up some boxes – the Club offers them free of charge.

BOC members will be fully aware of the dire situation of our farmland birds. Populations of most farmland specialist species have more than halved since the 1970s and some, like the Tree Sparrow and Turtle Dove, are now extinct or nearing extinction in Berkshire. Many farmers would like to help reverse this trend and the BOC is keen to support their efforts. President *emeritus*, Neil Bucknell, is leading our work with farmers on the Berkshire Downs and is seeking volunteers to help with farm surveys (nebulastreatley@btinternet.com).



Lastly, a plea for all records of Marsh Tit, Willow Tit and Bullfinch – the priority species for 2019. The status of Willow Tit and Marsh Tit is of national concern and so they are the subject of a national survey starting next year and Bullfinch is, we think, a much-overlooked species, whose distribution and abundance we want to understand better. Please put in all observations of these three species on www.berksbirds.co.uk or send to our Recorder, Richard Burness (records@berksoc.org.uk). And many thanks to all those who responded to the request for records of the three “target” species of specific interest in 2018.

Berkshire Records – Category 2 and 3 Species

Richard Burness

The Berkshire Records Committee are facing an increasing number of records that are submitted without the level of supporting evidence required (a description for Category 2 species, a short note for Category 3 species). We received well over 800 unsupported Category 3 reports in 2016 alone. The time and effort spent trying to validate these records is delaying the production of some of the database products. In the attempt to be as inclusive as possible the BRC will continue to accept multi-observer records and those submitted with a reasonable quality photograph (in the absence of any other evidence). However, from 1st January 2017, any individual Category 2 and Category 3 record submitted without the appropriate level of support will have to be flagged as “not proven” in the database and excluded from any outgoing data provision (including the annual report). This is unfortunate. The BRC hopes that observers will respond by providing us with as much information as possible when they report a rare or scarce bird in the future. It is in all our interests to do so.

Colour-ringed Black-headed Gulls

There is an ongoing programme to ring the Black-headed gulls that are bred in the Berkshire colonies. The process includes colour-ringing. If you should see any colour-ringed Black-headed Gull please note the date, location and ring number and send the details to the County Recorder at records@berksoc.org.uk

Why do the BRC do what they do?

Chairman Richard Burness

We probably all know what the Berkshire Records Committee (BRC) does but why do they do it?

The BRC remit is set out in its constitution*, and its performance is managed and evaluated by the NDOC and the BOC. In summary, it is charged with reviewing and adjudicating records of rare or scarce birds reported in the county. Initially it does this to ensure the scientific integrity of the county archive. This is an admirable aim in itself, but only part of the story. Most people’s contact with the recording process begins and ends with the submission of their records. However, the data doesn’t just sit in the database doing nothing it is put to work. There are products that are routinely developed directly from the database and customers who receive our data, some by a negotiated pre-arrangement and others as a response to a specific enquiry.

The one obvious product that everyone sees is The Birds of Berkshire Annual Report. The validation procedures that we go through ensure that the records in each year’s dataset are as accurate as possible for when we come to compile the systematic list. There are other products with which you may not be so familiar. On behalf of NDOC/BOC a data exchange agreement has been negotiated with the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC). This runs to some ten pages with forty-three clauses plus appendices, but boils down to both parties agreeing to exchange only the highest quality data to the highest resolution. Other outputs include the annual submissions to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (to be used in the development of national conservation strategy) and the Scarce Birds in Britain annual report.

Important elements of the County Recorder’s role are the need to liaise with national bodies, such as the BTO, and with other recorders, and to respond to public enquiries and supply data on request. In May of this year the BOC received a request for data from a company making the initial Environmental Impact Assessment and Habitat Regulation Assessment on behalf of the Heathrow Airport expansion project. Their suggested area of impact within Berkshire encompassed QMR, Wraysbury GPs and Horton GPs. This is a serious enquiry, not to be treated lightly. It’s serious for them as they are in the vanguard of a multi-billion-pound project. It’s serious for us because the impact area includes some of our most important wetlands. In these circumstances the data provided must be of the highest quality. It is to provide all these customers with Quality Assurance of data that the BRC puts so much effort into the validation of each individual record. Hence our concern about reporting Category 2 & 3 species as discussed above.

*<http://berksoc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Constitution-for-the-BRC-October-2016.pdf>

2018 AGM

Sally Wearing: secretary@berksoc.org.uk

At the AGM, on Wednesday 28th November 2018, Robert Godden was voted back onto the BOC Committee as an “ordinary committee member”; we look forward again to his contributions in this role.

See page 5 for the vote on removing the “Retired Discount” option from our subscription options.



At the AGM we were auctioning to Members by sealed bids two more of Robert Gillmor's original artworks which he donated for our "The Birds of Berkshire" annual reports with the proceeds going to the Club's conservation fund. The paintings were "Oystercatchers", from 2010, and 2011's "Roseate Tern", but unfortunately their reserve prices of £250 were not reached and so they remain unsold for now.



BOC Field Trips: The Season so Far

Ray Reedman

I missed both of the September trips, while Mary and I enjoyed my 'big birthday' trip to Crete. We did notch up some interesting birds there, but birding was incidental to the culture and history. Curiously I was thrilled to see Jackdaws at Knossos, since their name *monedula* connects directly to a legend concerning King Minos.

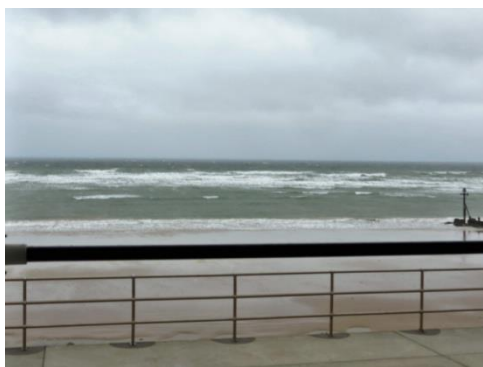
A trip on 10th to **Titchfield Haven**, led by Carole White, opened the 2018-19 season. Carole writes: "I arrived around 08.30, spent an hour watching the sea and enjoying a bacon butty. It was breezy and the sea choppy, but I did not spot any interesting sea-passage. At 09.30 I was joined by 6 members. We entered the reserve, walking the eastern, wooded section first. It was fairly quiet: we spotted a Whitethroat at one hide and watched a young Buzzard at another, as well as the usual species. We had a coffee/lunch stop at the Haven Cafe before walking along the sea-front to the west side of the reserve. At the Meon Shore Hide we enjoyed views of many Snipe driven on to the mud by the low water levels, as well as Common and Wood Sandpiper, Black-tailed Godwits and Redshanks, plus various ducks and gulls. We ventured up to the northern-most hide where we were rewarded with good views of a Kingfisher hunting and hovering over the pool. We had hoped to see Mediterranean Gull and finally saw one as we headed back to the cars. Last week's Temminck's had disappeared and the Bearded Tits were keeping their heads down, but overall it was an enjoyable day's birding. Around 45 species were seen."

Later in the month a number of BOC members joined the East Berks RSPB coach for a trip in fine weather to **Portland Bill and Radipole Lake**. (This report is summarised from the RSPB's web-site report). Unfortunately, it seems that the birds did not perform too well at Portland, with only: Shag, Cormorant and Gannet off-shore; species such as Wheatear, Meadow and Rock Pipits on the cliffs; and several Kestrels overhead. Later, at Radipole, five Cattle Egrets gave the day a real boost, as these were new to several people. Yellow Wagtails were present, but difficult, while a variety of ducks, Snipe and a Mediterranean Gull all gave some extra interest. A wasp spider was an unusual find and a mink was seen by one member.

The first weekend in October saw a group of nine of us off to the **North Norfolk** coast for the weekend. We spent a beautiful Friday afternoon at Titchwell absorbing the huge range of species of wildfowl (including several Red-crested Pochards) and waders. Some found a very confiding Yellow-browed Warbler along the sea-wall and saw Bearded Tits. A couple of Water Rails showed well too. Sea-watching produced two Red-throated Divers, one still showing summer plumage. Common Scoters were plentiful, as were Gannets and Brent Geese. A late juvenile Arctic Tern was a bonus. Later, a huge flock of Pink-footed Geese passed overhead and we saw other flocks over the next two days. A distant Peregrine and a Marsh Harrier were our only raptors, though our pre-supper visit to Thornham Marsh was rewarded with both Barn Owl and Short-eared Owl on the wing together in the twilight.



Saturday was a horrible day, with rain and a strong northerly wind, though it proved to be a great asset for our sea-watching. Our pre-breakfast sortie concentrated on the beach under the lee of the Hunstanton cliffs, where many waders gathered to feed on a narrow strip. Later, at Cley, we stopped at a roadside pool to watch several Jack Snipe during a lull in the rain. Then it was on to Sheringham, where one of the deep sea-front shelters (next picture) kept us and our optics dry for a wonderful session of sea-watching straight into the teeth of the storm. We all missed



something in the turmoil of waves and foam, but the birds were well in-shore as they passed. ‘Goodies’ included a flock of Eiders, Great and Arctic Skuas, and a Little Auk (a ‘lifer’ for me!). Back at the Titchwell hides later we found the ducks and waders much reduced, but another Jack Snipe was a favourite in the corner of the main pool and a Spoonbill appeared. By mid-afternoon we went inland to Flitcham, where we had a variety of different species, including a small flock of late Stone-curlews and a couple of Hares on a distant field. There was no owl-watch that evening, as conditions were still bad.

Sunday was a glorious day and the pre-breakfast sea-watch produced Great Skua, Eiders, Gannets and a Manx Shearwater, as well as a Purple Sandpiper on the beach. A visit to Cley shore later to find a solitary Snow Bunting also gave us the chance to do more sea-watching, the climax of which was the arrival off the sea of a Short-eared Owl which we all saw well. We finished our trip in the Sheringham area, failing to find one reported Barred Warbler (though Marcus and co found another later at another site). The storm had seeded the coast with a few such birds, but we had to get home.

Marcus I’Anson organised us very effectively to do the right things at the right places. What strikes me is that this third October trip to Norfolk was so different from the previous two: the weather patterns make a huge difference and the birds vary accordingly. This trip was notable for its sea-watching opportunities, last year for several rarities, and the year before for an astonishing fall of warblers and crests. **Please note that, due to accommodation issues, the dates for next year are now earlier than those published on the calendar. The trip will again be on the first weekend, 4th-6th October.**

The midweek BOC walk on 25th October was led by Adrian Lawson and explored **Southcote, Fobney and Coley Meadows**. Adrian reports as follows: “Five members and a dog set off on a cool grey day, simultaneously with a U3A group. A first scan of the fields at Southcote revealed a few birds but the Stonechats present the day before were nowhere to be seen. We had the first big flock of Fieldfares (estimated about 70). We followed the Holy Brook east for a hundred yards or so before we heard a call from the middle of the meadows that nobody could place. It didn’t call again and we moved down to the canal, the mystery still not solved!

Dunnock, Blue and Great Tit, Stock Dove and Kestrel were all seen. Once over the canal we scanned the fields to the south, former gravel pits, but now an area of rough grassland. Another flock of Fieldfares headed west, a couple of Magpies and another Kestrel showed. Along the canal towards Fobney we picked up a pair of Peregrines on a pylon. We shared the scope views with the U3A team and then scanned Fobney Island, which was uncharacteristically quiet: only a Grey Heron and a couple of Moorhens were seen.

The flooded meadows at Fobney were much better, with 20 or more Teal, 75 Lapwing, a brief glimpse of a Cattle Egret which we couldn’t all see, an obliging Little Owl, a Buzzard, a few Meadow Pipits overhead, lots of Wrens singing and one Stonechat, a female. We spilt up here and headed back across the meadows to our start point via the old railway line. We were late and hurried back, listening out for any unusual calls in the bushes but without luck.” *(Adrian stepped up this year as a new leader and I much appreciate his help in that. Looks like quite a good menu!)*



The first November trip was to **Rainham Marshes**, a site which we had not visited for some while. It is something of an oasis for the birds in a busy industrial area, but is conveniently only five minutes from the M25 Thames crossings. There were only four of us in one car, but it was a wonderful morning to be out. There were two Marsh Harriers, a Buzzard and a Kestrel, as well as Lapwings, a few Curlews, a few Snipe and a Green Sandpiper. The ducks included Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler, Pochard, Shelduck and Pintail. We couldn’t find anything of special interest among the many Greylags or the numerous gulls, though there were impressive numbers of Great Black-backs. At a site famed for its Glaucous-winged Gull, they were all worth careful scrutiny. Water Pipits showed three times. We also saw two Stonechats, but failed to see either

Cetti's Warbler or Bearded Tit, both of which we heard. We apparently missed a Bittern and the recent Cattle Egrets and Short-eared Owl didn't show that day.

On the 22nd November five of us joined Bill Nicoll at the **Jubilee River** for a walk in very grey and gloomy light. In spite of that we found well over 30 species on the walk along the river and at the edge of Dorney Common. There was a good variety of passerines, including a flock of Fieldfares, a few Redwings, a flock of Linnets and a Grey Wagtail, plus good variety of gulls, ducks and other water birds, including Snipe. A very obliging Sparrowhawk made two appearances, the second almost overhead. A Buzzard was perched near the sewage works.

Anagrinds

Ray Reedman

This time around Ray has abandoned his crossword puzzles and word searches and instead tempts us to identify exotic Trinidad birds from the following equally exotic anagrams.

1	HARBOUR DEER-MITE FUSS	11	BLUE MOUSE KIT
2	ORDERED CLEAN STOOP	12	GRAB AS QUICKEST BULL
3	LO! THE RAGE AWAKEN	13	RAIDING A DUMPING-PIT
4	PIED LOON WRECKED TEA	14	THIN-BACKED GULL'S WICKED BILL
5	LONE BUCOLIC BIRD, LEO	15	DAI TAKES GREEK
6	PROPEL CHEERY U.N. PEER	16	TRY WANTED PIRATE
7	BLIND CAUSE	17	CARIB ISLETS
8	GARBLE RED-LENTIL	18	SCOPED CAT WELL
9	A WRONG LAW'S LATE	19	PLANE CORONER WIPED BROW
10	STEER GABLE	20	ICE OR HEIRLOOM?

Good luck!

(Solution to Newsletter 75 Wordsearch:

- Horizontal – Dipper, Ptarmigan, Grey Heron, Siskin, Bittern
- Vertical – Cormorant, Pheasant, Rook, Merlin, Avocet
- Diagonally – Raven, Coot, Jay, Wren, Peregrine, Eider.)

Membership Matters

Iain Oldcorn bocmembershipsec@hotmail.co.uk

2018/19 membership subscription were due on 1 October. Will those few of you that have not yet paid please do so now or advise me that you do not intend to renew; please note that if you have a QMR Permit and have not paid your subscription yet then I will not be able to issue you your replacement 2019 permit.

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.

Subscription Rates – Retired Members

As explained in the last Newsletter, the Club is looking at ways to increase our revenue so as to be able to maintain our work.

At the recent AGM a change to our Constitution was approved which enables us to withdraw the subscription discount making it unavailable for future retirees. 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, and a number of members have already done so.

Please note 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 will 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/>

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



Whooper Swan/Moor Green Lakes/Michael Hunt



Reed Warbler/Dorney/Ewan Jones



Sedge Warbler/Dorney/Ewan Jones



Stonechat/Ilsley/Ewan Jones



Kestrel/Dorney/Ewan Jones



Thrush/Theale/Ewan Jones