

Minutes of the BRC meeting held at 20.00 on 14th May 2019

Present: - R. J. Burness (Chairman), A. Horscroft (Secretary), A. Bassett, A. E. D. Hickman, H. Netley, K. E. Moore and M. F. Walford.

1. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting, held on 15th January 2019, were accepted as written.

2. Actions outstanding

- a) The action on MFW to update the Work in Progress (WiP) software was completed.
- b) The action for all members to test the WiP software was completed.
- c) The action for RJB and MFW to maintain the WiP table of records has been completed to date.
- d) The action on all members to review the Category 2 records for 2017 using the WiP software has been completed.
- e) The action on all members to review the dataset of 2017 Category 3 records is made redundant by item 5 below.
- f) The action on all members to review the Category 2 and Category 3 species lists has been completed.
- g) The action on RJB to make public the changes to the Category lists has been completed through publication in county newsletters.
- h) The action on RJB to determine a methodology for recording the county's scarce breeding birds is ongoing and progress is reported in item 8 below.
- i) The action on RJB to make Lapwing a target species for 2020 will be completed at the appropriate time.
- j) The action on RJB to develop a table of first and last dates for migrant species is ongoing but is labour-intensive and time-consuming.

3. BRC report for *The Birds of Berkshire 2016 annual report*

KEM will write the report in liaison with MFW. The list of pended Category 2 species can now be generated automatically from the database. MFW hopes to extend this routine to Category 3 species. After discussion, the committee decided that the scope of the report should include only pended 2016 records, not historical data. This will still provide observers with the opportunity to submit further evidence to support their records.

Action KEM and MFW

4. Status of 2017 Category 2 review

The committee discussed and reviewed those Category 2 records for 2017 that were still pended because of either a split decision or a lack of clarity of the original descriptions or photographs. Two records continue to be pended and RJB was asked to try and secure more details from the observers. The Chairman stressed that, despite the success of the WiP centralised review routine, the committee should meet in person to discuss those records that had proven contentious, to fulfil their responsibility towards the observers.

Action RJB

5. Status of 2017 Category 3 review

MFW briefed the committee about the work he had done to extend the WiP routine to include the Category 3 records. The process was time-consuming but the application of filters to the dataset had reduced the number of records from 1200 to a more

manageable number. The resulting dataset is semi-automatically generated from the WiP software. MFW suggested that he should maintain and populate the Category 3 WiP table once a year. Although it was time-consuming and a little cumbersome it was preferable to the current system of circulating spreadsheets to the committee members. MFW was thanked for his efforts to streamline the review process.

6. Preparation for the review of 2018 Category 2 records

The chairman will supply MFW with the descriptions and photographs that he has received in support of 2018 Category 2 records so that the former can populate the 2018 WiP table.

Action RJB

7. Countering negative feedback

The committee discussed the on-going negative feedback that the BRC receives. They decided that the way forward is to continue our policy of inclusiveness and openness, and to take every opportunity to encourage reluctant observers to submit their records. KEM was concerned about the impact negative attitudes could have on younger observers. He suggested that one way to counter this was to recruit younger birders into the BOC (or the NDOC) through offering them free or reduced rate subscriptions. He and AH will raise this matter with the BOC committee.

Action KEM and AH

8. Rare Breeding Birds

- a) RJB briefed the committee about occurrences of rare/scarce birds breeding in the county this year, and steps being taken to protect them.
- b) RJB briefed the committee about a potential method for recording those species breeding in Berkshire that are scarce, though not nationally rare. The annual RBBP data submission spreadsheet will form the basis of an archive. The threshold for qualification as a county scarce breeder is rather arbitrary. Those species with less than 20 breeding pairs will qualify. However, Firecrest has just been removed from the RBBP list and it was considered important that its progress continues to be monitored. RJB will consult the most experienced birders in the county to determine estimates of the numbers of likely qualifying species to provide a starting point.

Action RJB

- c) KEM raised the question of known rare breeding birds. The members of the committee are aware of the breeding potential of some species that are reported to the BRC in confidence. The BRC have the opportunity to be active in the monitoring and protection process.

Action all members

9. Any other business

- a) KEM described the land-scaping work currently under way at Burnthouse Lane. He provided members with a plan of work and described its likely impact on the area's wildlife and observer access. He continues to liaise with the site owners.
- b) AEDH described the positive work that is being undertaken by BBOWT at Greenham and Crookham common in relation to ground nesting birds. This includes the deployment of seasonal wardens, whose role is to educate visitors and persuade them to refrain from entering the red-zoned areas and from walking through the open heathland habitat where Dartford Warblers, Stonechats and Woodlarks nest, and scrub clearance work at Crookham common which has resulted in multiple breeding attempts by up to six pairs of Lapwing and two pairs of Little Ringed Plover. This led to a general discussion about disturbance, over-

grazing and the difficulties of providing protection to wildlife in an area with open access.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 22.15 and thanked the members for their attendance and participation