

## The Birds of Berkshire Conservation Fund 2003 - 2020

The Birds of Berkshire Conservation Fund was started in 2003 by the Atlas Group with the surplus from sales of the first edition of *The Birds of Berkshire*. In 2006, it was merged with the Berkshire Ornithological Club's conservation fund and managed jointly by the Club and the Atlas Group. Following the publication of the second edition of *The Birds of Berkshire* in 2013 and the success of the Group in raising sponsorship to cover the production costs, we were able to donate all of the proceeds of sales, nearly £25,000, to the Conservation Fund. In total, up to 2020, the fund has received donations of £46,000, two thirds of which arose from sales of the two editions of Berkshire's atlas and avifauna, with a further £15,000 donated by members.

The Fund is dedicated to conservation of wild birds and their habitats and to underpinning research and monitoring in Berkshire. Applications for grants come from individuals or organisations and assessed by the BOC's Conservation Subcommittee for the conservation benefit they would provide and their feasibility. Applications may be made at any time and usually assessed within a few weeks. The criteria and application form are on the Club's website <http://berksoc.org.uk/conservation/conservation-fund>. The Fund has been open for applications since 2003 and it has awarded twenty five grants, involving fifteen different applicants and totalling £18,000. Most applications are unsolicited, though a proportion arise from projects initiated by the BOC. Collaboration is encouraged with other funders or with landowners and others contributing "in kind", so gearing up the fund's contribution.

Given the fund's relatively small size, most grants are for less than £1,000, though larger awards may be made for strategically valuable projects. A few examples of work that has been supported are given below and a full list can be found in Appendix 1.

### Habitat creation and management

- Friends of Lavell's Lake (now Lavell's Wetland Trust) for a sluice to give better control of water levels, to help breeding birds and enhance birdwatching from the hides at Lavell's Lake.
- Support for work at [Fobney Island Nature Reserve](#), a wetland reserve created in 2011 by Reading Borough Council, the Environment Agency and Thames Water. The BOC worked with the design team and has been instrumental in management of the reserve through the Friends of Fobney.



Fobney Island May 2012



Fobney Island July 2013

- The Fund together with Padworth Parish Council, have supported the creation of a design and management plan for a nature reserve at **Padworth Lane Gravel Pit**. This 34 ha site on the River Kennet has been designated a Local Wildlife Site on the basis of its bird biodiversity. It includes an open lake, the river bank and an unusual area of flooded woodland. It is owned by the Canal and River Trust with whom the BOC is negotiating a lease so that it can be managed as a nature reserve for wetland



## Species protection

- To help wardens at Greenham Common to protect **heathland birds** the fund provided a telescope for monitoring Woodlark, Dartford Warbler, Ringed and Little Ringed Plover.
- **Tree Sparrows** ceased to breed in Berkshire around 2003, though there had been occasional winter records up to 2011/12. In 2014, the BOC initiated feeding of finches at the more recent wintering sites in the hope that any Tree Sparrows arriving could be attracted to recolonise the area. Sadly, no Tree Sparrows were found, though Reed Buntings, Yellowhammers and a few Brambling used the feeders.
- **Little Ringed Plover** are scarce breeders in Berkshire that nest on bare ground, in Berkshire typically in gravel workings. Their habitat is often ephemeral and often vulnerable to flooding, so the birds often move from year to year. The support of landowners and farmers is often crucial to enable these delicate waders to breed successfully and each year one of the conservation team, Ken Moore, works with gravel workings operators to help them avoid damaging nests

However, the massive early spring floods in 2020 meant that most of the usual sites were inaccessible to the plover, Unexpectedly, two pairs were found on a wheat field in West Berkshire, many kilometres from other known sites. With a rapidly arranged contribution from the Fund to compensate in part for loss of crop, the landowner left the field unsown until both pairs had bred, fledging an impressive total of six young.



- To help mitigate the continuing loss of nest sites for **Swifts** in older buildings, the Fund instigated a programme to provide nest boxes free of charge for people to install at suitable sites. Thanks to sterling work by carpenter Bob Hulley we have been able to provide over a hundred boxes for sites across the County. Most have been installed in clusters, with Swift streets in Newbury, Tilehurst, east Reading and Wargrave. Ailsa Claybourn, our Swift Champion, has found schools and churches as well as many homes willing to offer sites

and SSE has generously provided cherry pickers to install them. The first boxes went up for the 2019 season and, though it will be some years before we can assess its success, I have been delighted to see my boxes were being visited in 2019 and 2020.



## Research and monitoring

- The [Newbury Ringing Group](#) for its work on its constant effort site in Thatcham reedbeds and elsewhere.
- The Birds of Berkshire Atlas Group for start-up funds for the Birds of Berkshire Atlas Group for bird survey work for the revision of the county [Atlas and Avifauna](#), the second edition of which was published in 2013.

**Donations** to the Club's conservation work can be made via our website <http://berksoc.org.uk/> by a bank transfer to Berkshire Ornithological Club, sort code 09-01-55 account no. 09138608 (Santander), quoting "Conservation Fund", or by post to Eleanor Pitts, BOC Treasurer, The Squirrels, 79 Kennylands Road, Sonning Common, Reading RG4 9JR.

## Appendix 1

<b>Birds of Berkshire Conservation Fund - Grants awarded</b>			
<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Project</b>	<b>Amount awarded</b>	<b>Year of award</b>
Newbury Ringing Group	Ringing materials	£200	2002/3
Friends of Lavell's Lake	Sluice for Tern Scrape	£1,146	2003/4
Pang Valley Project (BBOWT)	Fence protection of ground-nesting birds at Paices Hill	£600	2003/4
Moor Green Lakes Group	Barn Owl boxes	£600	2004/5
Birds of Berkshire Atlas Group	Start up funding for 2007-11 atlas	£500	2004/5
Newbury Ringing Group	Ringing materials	£200	2005/6
John Lerpiniere	Barn Owl boxes for West Berkshire	£300	2006/7
Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre	Woodland management programme	£1,000	2008/9
John Lerpiniere	Barn Owl boxes for West Berkshire	£184	2008/9
Pang, Kennet & Lambourn FWAG	Pang Valley Conservation Project - Support for farmers advisory group	£1,000	2009/10
BBOWT	Telescope for Greenham Common wardens	£395	2010/11
BOC with National Trust	Nest boxes for woodland species at Basildon Park (NT)	£145	2010/11
BBOWT	Woolley Firs Ringing project	£628	2011/12
BOC	Passerine nest boxes	£110	
Jealott's Hill Neighbourhood Garden project	Passerine nest boxes	£150	2013/4
Pang Valley Barn Owl Group	Barn Owl boxes	£300	2013/4
BOC project	Winter feeding for Tree Sparrow	£236	2014/5
BOC project	Signage for Padworth Lane GPs and Fobney Island	£250	2015/6
John Lerpiniere	Nest boxes for woodland species and Barn Owl	£250	2015/6
BOC project	Padworth Lane GPs nature reserve design and management plan	£4,500	2017/8
Newbury Ringing Group	Feed supplies	£300	2017/8
BOC project	Swift box provision	£1,200	2018/20
Ken White	Peregrine nesting platform and camera	£3,000 <sup>1</sup>	2018/9
NDOC	Lower Farm maintenance	£323 <sup>2</sup>	2018/9
Debby Reynolds/Tim Culley	Little Ringed Plover: compensation to farmer for loss of crop at a new breeding site in West Berkshire.	£500	2019/20
<b>Total awarded</b>		<b>£18,017</b>	

<sup>1</sup> committed but not yet spent

<sup>2</sup> award repaid (not needed)