

## Berkshire Ornithological Club Conservation Subcommittee

7.30pm Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 on Zoom

1. **Present:** Neil Bucknell, Patrick Crowley, Chris Foster, Renton Righelato, Des Sussex, Marek Walford.  
**Apologies:** Fraser Cottingham, Roger Frankum, Ken Moore.
2. Minutes of meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> October 2020: approved.
3. **Matter arising** not covered elsewhere:
  - a. Lower Farm potential sale: no further news has been received.
  - b. Grebe survey report: incomplete action: [Chris Foster](#), [Renton Righelato](#)
  - c. Conservation fund: £2k held for conservation at Fobney island has been transferred from the BOC General Reserve to the Conservation Fund (now £36k).
4. **Summary of main actions since the last meeting:** in response to a request from Sean Murphy (BTO rep for Berkshire), the BTO advice on its surveys has been put on the BOC website. Its interpretation of government guidance states “...this entails limiting your **survey** activities to within the boundary of the property in which you reside.”

No BOC surveys are being carried out this winter. A meeting will be held in early March (provisionally set for 9<sup>th</sup>) to plan breeding season surveys in the light of government guidance expected by then ([Renton](#) to organise).

5. **Planning: response to West Berkshire Council consultation on NE Thatcham development proposal** As background, Neil explained that the UK government now requires developers in England to create a net gain in biodiversity of at least 10%.  
[see <https://www.biodiversityinplanning.org/news/bd-net-gain/>].  
He suggested that Biodiversity Action Plans of the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership and local authorities be reviewed to take account of this opportunity. Des noted that the current Environment Bill has a requirement for Nature Recovery Networks to be established by Natural England. It was hoped that the NRNs would build on what has already been done in creating Biodiversity Opportunity Areas and Local Wildlife Sites in addition to the statutorily protected areas such as SSSIs and SACs. Des will seek more information from Natural England and the Berkshire LNP.  
[See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nature-recovery-network/nature-recovery-network>]  
The response to the NE Thatcham proposal that Neil had circulated prior to the meeting was discussed and enthusiastically agreed. Neil to submit response.
6. **Planning: West Berkshire Council consultation on minerals development plan** Neil explained that only two new sites were listed in the West Berkshire minerals plan: a small field close to Chieveley services and a larger area (c 35 ha) halfway between Wigmore Lane GPs and Padworth Lane GPs. Restored as wetland, the latter could create a valuable link in the corridor of protected wetlands along the lower Kennet and Neil made this point in the response he had prepared to the consultation, which was agreed. Neil's response to the consultation on the West Berkshire Local Plan to 2036 was also agreed.
7. **Peregrine Survey:** Patrick Crowley put forward a proposal for a survey of breeding Peregrines with the aim of locating sites and, where appropriate, installing nesting platforms, which have been shown to increase breeding success. It was thought that numbers have increased perhaps twofold since the last Atlas survey (four sites). The committee supported the proposal.

Because of movement restrictions during the coronavirus epidemic, surveying this spring would be limited mostly to urban areas with known or suspected sites, but a fuller survey could be planned for 2022. Patrick and Renton will draft a call for information for this winter/spring for publicising shortly. Patrick will draw up the survey methodology making use of what has been done in Hampshire by Keith Betton (who has already been helping on some Berkshire Peregrine sites).

8. **Survey plans for 2021:** see also item 4 above.

- a. Farm surveys: Neil had taken part in the North Wessex Downs AONB forum. It appears that formation of farmer clusters along the Ridgeway, with which we hope to collaborate, is “on hold”. However, coronavirus restrictions permitting, surveys will be arranged for Beeswax land and at West Woodhay. Three new volunteer surveyors had come forward in response to recent calls.
- b. Aldermarston GPs: Subject to the lifting of coronavirus restrictions, we hope to carry out breeding bird surveys at Aldermaston GPs.

9. **Site updates**

- a. **Padworth GPs** – TVERC is carrying out a LWS review and has asked for bird records that Ken Moore is compiling.
- b. **Fobney** – Renton reported (a) discussions involving Reading B. C., E.A., Friends of Fobney and others are progressing on management of water levels on Fobney Meadow. Whilst wet most of the year, the meadow dries in late spring, making it unsuitable for many of the wetland species that attempt to breed. (b) in anticipation of a planning application for warehousing on the landfill south of Fobney Island Nature Reserve, bird surveys were being done on the proposed buffer area of tall ruderal vegetation and scrub.
- c. **Lea Farm:** Renton reported that much of the northern half of the lakeshore has been landscaped to give a shallower profile and create over a hectare of reedbed and two hectares of marsh and shallows. The work, by Lavell’s Wetland Trust, was funded as a biodiversity offset by Network Rail.
- d. **Thames Basin Heaths:** Des welcomed the bird monitoring report on the Thames Basin Heaths that has shown an increase in key heathland species (Nightjar, Woodlark, Dartford Warbler) since the late 1990s. It was hoped that the lessons learnt here would be published to inform heathland management elsewhere in Berkshire. [<https://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/news/2020-record-numbers/>]

10. **AOB**

- a. Promotion of Conservation Fund: As few applications to the fund have been coming forward, it was agreed that we publicise it more widely. It should be brought to the attention of local conservation groups (eg Moor Green Lakes Group, Theale Area Bird Conservation Group, Lavell’s wetland Trust, Friends of Fobney, Wild Maidenhead) and BBOWT. There may also be situations where a small grant might provide farmers/landowners with an impetus to carry out a conservation project. All to promote the fund; Renton to distribute an announcement.
- b. Neil noted that Network Rail have a new biodiversity offset grant scheme, “Mend the Gap” targeted on the Chilterns <https://www.chilternsaonb.org/mend-the-gap.html>

11. **Date of next meeting:** 27<sup>th</sup> April 2021

Distribution: Neil Bucknell, Fraser Cottington, Chris Foster, Roger Frankum, John Lerpiniere, Renton Righelato, Des Sussex, Marek Walford. Patrick Crowley.