

**Minutes of meeting of
Berkshire Ornithological Club Conservation Subcommittee**
Held on 24-2-2022 at 8pm

Present- Neil Bucknell (NB), Renton Righelato (RR), Lesley Staves (LS), Patrick Crowley (PC), Chris Foster (CF) & Marek Walford (MW)

- 1 **Apologies** were received from Des Sussex, Ken Moore Fraser Cottington & Roger Frankum.
- 2 **Minutes of meeting held on 23 November 2021** – approved
- 3 **Matters arising not covered elsewhere**
 - 3.1 RR reported that after a couple of amendments requested by Natural England, the report on Aldermaston GP had been submitted
 - 3.2 RR also reported that there had been no further sites where House Martins had been reported other than the one found in the 2021 summer survey
- 4 **Actions since last meeting**

It was reported that Ken White had been paid for the latest batch of Peregrine boxes
- 5 **Berkshire LNP Refresh**

NB presented the summary document circulated previously. There had been a series of meetings of a working group with a facilitator with experience of establishing or refreshing LNPs. There would be a stakeholder meeting on 14 March. It was generally felt that the future of the LNP as a viable and worthwhile body was dependent on funding being secured for a full-time staff member to drive the projects proposed.

One of the early tasks proposed was a baseline report on wildlife in the county which was something to which we could contribute. It was hoped that this might inform emerging Nature Recovery Network and Biodiversity Net Gain plans.
- 6 **Peregrines**

PC reported on the various Berkshire sites as follows-

Bracknell – A new box had been put on the Fujitsu building to replace the old one.

Hungerford - A box has been put at the request of the vicar, although no Peregrines frequent the area yet

Newbury – a pair is present near the town centre site

Reading – the box on the Blade, which had not been used has been relocated to what is hoped might be a better position. A box on a pole is being erected near the gas holder that is being demolished east of the town centre.

PC hopes to recruit more surveyors, and is using Berks Bird for publicity.
- 7 **Farm Surveys and associated matters**
 - 7.1 NB had circulated a report based on 2 years survey on the Beeswax Dyson estate at Churn/Compton, and one at West Ilsley. This indicated that the wide drove way corridors (with rough grass and hedge or intermittent blackthorn bush margins) had the best numbers of the target species. It was intended to complete the series of surveys by doing a second season of surveys at West Ilsley. **ACTION – NB to circulate report to AONB office & landowners**
 - 7.2 The farmer cluster project in the N Wessex Downs AONB were taking off. The AONB office now had a FIPL (Farming in Protected Landscapes) officer. There was a considerable demand among the farmers joining the clusters for bird surveys to be undertaken on their

farms. Contact had been made with the enabler for a large cluster in the lower Pang and Kennet that stretched from Bucklebury and Thatcham to the A33. This had resulted in requests from 6 farms for surveys. One of these (Sulham Estate) had independently contacted TABCG and NB about surveys, and BB and Cathy McEwan had inspected the area on 22-2-22.

It was clear that a less intensive survey method would be needed. NB envisaged perhaps two visits in the breeding season and two in winter along transects that took in a representative selection of the habitats and management regimes on each farm. He intended to consult with Keith Betton in Hampshire who had also organised surveys for farm clusters.

CF indicated he was prepared to help and suggested Adrian Hickman, who had undertaken surveys for some of the owners.

8 Site Reports

8.1 **Padworth Lane** – KM had been contacted by the Canal and River Trust (CRT), the owners, and a meeting had provisionally been set up for 17 March. It was hoped that someone from Harleyfords, the mineral company would attend, and that this might mean some progress after many years delay in implementing the management plan. It was noted that the site had deteriorated, with *crassula* invading the gravel area and fences falling into disrepair.

8.2 **Lower Farm** – LS reported that the site no longer seemed to be marketed for sale. It appeared that Rivar, the owner, was considering it being offered as an environmental offset site. In the meantime NDOC continued to manage the site on a day to day basis. In response to a query RR agreed to provide details of the BBOWT contact for contact about borrowing the BOC-funded boat in accordance with the arrangements made for such use.

9 AOB

9.1 RR raised the issue of woodland birds and the lack of any current activity related to them. Preparing his talk for the BOC 75th anniversary meeting it struck him that there were a number of species that were declining or had ceased or almost ceased breeding, including Tree Pipit, Wood Warbler, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Marsh and Willow Tit. It was recognised that there was a lack of woodland bird knowledge on the committee. CF mentioned a colleague who was a woodland ecologist, and now that DS worked for the Royal Park at Windsor, it was suggested he might be asked if one of his new colleagues might be able to help.

9.2 RR also reported that there were only 5 of the swift boxes left. It was decided not to procure any more for the time being and it might be worth seeing how successful those installed so far had been.

10 Next Meeting

Wednesday 25 May at 8pm

