



Berkshire Ornithological Club



2022-23 Report of Chair and Officers to BOC AGM

1. Chair's Report

Firstly, I apologise for not being able to attend the AGM. I am grateful that our President is able to present this report on my behalf.

I have found my first year as Chair to be very busy, but that is to be expected. I am glad to say that we have made good progress in some areas, although not as much as I would have liked. We are always looking for volunteers to help run the Club; we have a range of tasks that need doing, so any help is welcome, from a few hours to becoming a member of the committee.

2. Membership

This has continued to decline slowly, but we have continued to get new members joining. At our first indoor meeting of the 2022-23 season, we welcomed six new members and received enquiries from another three people.

Iain Oldcorn, our Membership Secretary, has continued to invite 12 other local birding and conservation groups to our indoor meetings, and has streamlined the procedure he follows. If anyone knows of any groups that may be interested in being invited, please contact Iain.

Following Thames Water making changes to the access to Queen Mother Reservoir, Iain has managed to simplify how the permits for QMR are administered.

Iain has also reorganised the way that membership information is stored to ensure it is easily accessible in case of the Membership Secretary being unavailable.

If anyone who still receives our mailings by post has an email address, please do tell Iain as this helps reduce our costs, especially for producing the newsletter.

3. Programme

The Indoor Programme

We have continued to run our meetings both in person at the University and on zoom for those who cannot or do not wish to travel. We are also still opening our meetings to everyone, as part of our aim to inspire and educate people in Berkshire about birds and conservation.

Our 2022/2023 season started on October 8th with Conor Jameson and his Idle Days in Patagonia. Unfortunately, this was poorly attended, partly because several members were away on Scilly!

Waders on the Move on 19th October was better attended, with 25 in the room and 15 on Zoom. This turned out to be fairly typical, as the average for the year was about 40. Numbers joining us on zoom varied greatly, from a low of 10 to a high of 49. That audience was for the talk on March 1st on the science and conservation of woodland birds, which attracted a combined audience of at least 67; clearly a popular subject.

Providing free refreshments also seems to be popular and encourages members to mingle a little.

The facility of Zoom now is a double-edged sword. whilst it means that we can have talks presented from distant places at much less cost and that members can still appreciate the talks if they cannot attend for whatever reason, it can be seen as an easy option and resulting in lower attendances in the room. This can be disappointing for speakers who have often travelled some distance to speak to us.

Thanks to all who support me and the club and who make the meetings go so well.

The Outdoor Programme

There was a full programme of local and regional walks last season, most of which were well attended. One innovation last year was Peter Driver's monthly walks for beginners, which proved popular and are continuing. Bob Lyle led regular winter walks to the south coast, which were shared with NDOC. There were also old favourites such as a summer evening on the Berkshire Downs.

The new season has started and will be similar to the last one, except we are including three trips by minibus.

We are also looking for more people to lead walks and trips. And we are still seeking someone to take on the role of Outdoor Programme Secretary, which is currently being fulfilled by the committee. Please consider volunteering, as this is not an onerous role, but one that would allow you to combine helping run the Club with birding trips.

4. Strategy & Publicity

We started a strategy group in 2022 to further the aim of the BOC to advance public education. Initially, we focused on the indoor meetings, including publicising them to non-members.

We have continued to review what we do and investigate ways we can improve how we meet the Club's aims over the last year. This included holding an informal meeting in March 2023 with our new President, Debby Reynolds, that proved productive.

Since then, we have drafted, agreed and published our strategy statement, which was issued as part of the annual mailing to members. Our next step is to develop an action plan that will help us implement our strategy.

Social Media – Chris is due to send a report on this, which needs to be added here and also included in the slides.

5. Editorial Board

Early in the year, we published the 2018 Birds of Berkshire report. This was distributed to members with their copy of Berkshire's Birdscapes.

The editorial team of Robert Godden and Sally Wearing are finding that it is getting a little easier to produce the reports. During the year, they made good progress with the 2019 report, which is currently being printed, and the systematic list for 2020.

We have been increasing the number of photographs in the reports; Andy Tomczynski, the photographic editor, is keen to receive more photos of birds taken in Berkshire that may be suitable for future reports. As well of pictures of rare and scarce birds recorded during the year, we also want to include good quality photos of common species to show the wide diversity of birds in the county.

Berkshire's Birdscapes, Renton Righelato's last publication, has been distributed widely to people involved in planning and nature conservation. We hope they will find the information in it useful when deciding on future actions. This publication received a very positive review by Birdguides.

6. Conservation Sub-committee

Sadly, there is little to report on the Padworth Lane project. Despite renewed interest from the site's owners, Canal and Rivers Trust, they have failed to make any progress in their attempts to get the mineral company that extracted the gravel to progress the work to start restoration works, nor to persuade the local authority to take steps to press for the conditions of the planning permission under which the gravel was extracted, which includes a requirement for such works, to be fulfilled.

There is news about Lower Farm Gravel Pit near Newbury where NDOC has been looking after the site and maintaining a hide on the site for many years. Newbury Racecourse has agreed to buy the site, but so far have indicated that they do not wish to enter into any formal arrangements to secure it as a nature reserve. They are however content for current arrangements to continue for the time being.

We have also been in contact with the Environment Agency about the condition of the Dorney Wetlands, which were created as mitigation measures as part of the Jubilee River scheme. The Agency has confirmed that they have exhausted the budget for continuing maintenance, and we are seeking a meeting to discuss possible arrangements for future management work to be undertaken by volunteers.

Patrick Crowley has continued co-ordinating efforts to monitor Peregrine breeding sites and liaison with their owners. This year has been less successful than last year, with a number of pairs failing to raise young this year at sites where successful breeding occurred in previous years.

We have completed farm surveys for two landowners, the Englefield Estate and the Sulham Estate. The results now need to be written up for reports to the owners. A paper on the surveys previously carried out at Compton and West Ilsley has been written and will appear in a future annual report.

Our local authorities are now starting the preparation of a Local Nature Recovery Strategy as required by the Environment Act 2021. We intend to play an active part in the consultation process. We are also now represented on the board of Berkshire's Local Nature Partnership.

We have approved two applications for grants from the Conservation Fund, for work on the Newbury Peregrine nest box and for fencing to protect a newly-planted reed bed at Lea Farm for the Lavell's Wetland Trust. Although we are still safeguarding funds in the hope that the Padworth Lane project will proceed, we do have funds available for small grants so please contact us if you have a suitable project seeking support.

7. Thanks

It was an honour for me to be asked to be the club's chairman, but I am only able to fulfil the role with the support of our committee. I would like to thank all the committee members for their hard work and contributions over the last year. We are unfortunately losing Andy Tomczynski and Marek Walford from the committee at this AGM, but they will both still be involved with the BOC – Andy as photographic editor of our reports and Marek as County Recorder. Many thanks to them both for their work on the committee. I am also pleased that Debby has become our President – thanks to Renton for suggesting her!

Sally Wearing

Chair

November 2023