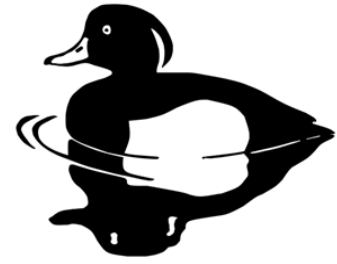


Newsletter No 94

August 2024



Editorial

Iain Oldcorn (bocmembershipsec@hotmail.co.uk)

Welcome to our 94th BOC Newsletter. As usual we kick off with our latest Conservation news from Neil, and Sean follows with a BTO update. We have just one BOC trip to report: Evening on the Berkshire Downs. Elaine challenges our knowledge of the scientific names of many familiar, and some less well known, birds before Jane reminds us of the more hilarious approach to bird names that cropped up at our last Christmas Social. Four Committee Members went to Earley Fair to encourage more people to join us. Jane and Edwin ask for help with Club admin and money. Jane digs up more archives. Peter Driver answers the challenges of his last mini crossword before finally, another selection of Andy's excellent photos!

A Brief Update from the Conservation Sub-Committee August 2024 Neil Bucknell

Sites – at Padworth Lane Gravel Pit, we are still waiting for Harleyford (the gravel company that extracted the gravel) to put forward their revised plans for restoring the pit. There is a site at Streatley that might come forward as a small reserve where we are helping out with preliminary plans, but there is a lot to do to agree terms with the landowner and obtain grants for planning work. NDOC seem to be getting on with Newbury Racecourse, new owners of Lower Farm, in taking forward day to day management there.

We are continuing to participate in the process of formulating a **Local Nature Recovery Strategy** for Berkshire. It is hoped that a draft strategy will be published for public consultation towards the end of the year.

Surveys and monitoring – Patrick Crowley reported that although nine Peregrine territories appeared occupied this spring, breeding only seems to have occurred at three. Curlews have been difficult to find on the Downs this year. A second year of surveys has been undertaken for the Sulham Estate to help establish baseline information against which their proposed biodiversity net gain project can be assessed. Their Lapwings have apparently bred successfully, which is encouraging for a species that otherwise seems to be struggling in the county.

Grants – two have been awarded. One has funded Barn Owl boxes for the Mortimer Space for Nature group, another has supported a farmer protecting a Little Ringed Plover breeding site on land that had previously flooded in the Pang Valley - a visit late in June found seven chicks at the site.

A reminder – we do welcome grant applications for bird (or bird habitat) related projects in the county. Please contact us for an application form!

The criteria we apply when considering applications for grants and the way to apply can be found here - <http://berksoc.org.uk/conservation/conservation-fund/>.

Updates and News from the BTO

Sean T Murphy (s.murphy@cabi.org)

As many will know, the current seasonal BTO bird surveys, the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS - 2024), the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS – 2023/24), the Heronries Census (2024) and the Woodcock Survey (2024) closed at the end of June. So, as for previous years, a *huge, huge* thank you to all who contributed. I will soon be in touch with volunteers; however, in the meantime, please enter any outstanding data by the end of August. If you need more time after this, please let me know so I can flag that data is coming!

Thanks! And of course, if anyone is interested in learning more about any of these surveys, or would like to get involved, then do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

At this time of year, some wader migrants are already on the move. Thus, for those who participate in the WeBS and/or are more generally interested in waders, BTO are running a **free** Wader ID Refresher course on Tuesday 27th August, 19:00 – 20:30, by zoom. This will cover the fundamental aspects of wader ID. This course is aimed at 'improver' level. If you are interested, see:

<https://www.bto.org/community/events/202408-ni-refresher-wader-id-tuesday-27th-august-7pm>

Turning to garden birds, the BTO launched the 'Blackbirds in Gardens' project in May this year. This project aims to help understand how Blackbirds use gardens and the issue of the impact of the Usutu virus (mosquito vectored) that is affecting this species in some areas. The virus was first detected affecting Blackbirds in 2016 in the Netherlands. The survey is a Vector-Borne RADAR project run in partnership with the Animal and Plant Health Agency, the Health Security Agency and the Zoological Society of London. The survey is very simple and only requires the need to identify male, female and juveniles apart. Volunteers are asked to submit, when possible, one set of counts of Blackbirds from their garden per week (Sunday to Saturday). This is for as many weeks as possible up to the last Saturday in October this year. Each count only takes 15 minutes and can be done on any day and at any time. Multiple counts per week are especially welcome! The project will also run in 2025. If you are interested, please see the project web site on how to get involved: www.bto.org/blackbirds

The new Winter Gull Roost Survey (WinGS – see the BOC December 2023 Newsletter for the background to this survey) is asking for volunteers to count gulls this autumn. The earlier national gull surveys only focussed on counts in the winter, but it is now important to assess populations at roosts in the autumn as some species will group in large numbers in the autumn months before moving to their winter grounds. The sites to be assessed are the same as those used for the winter counts and can be seen on the site map on the project web site: www.bto.org/wings. The autumn count is open to existing volunteers and to new ones. The key date of the autumn count is the 29th September but a count can be made a week before or after this date. If you are interested, then please contact me (see above).

Lastly, an update on another new survey, the Urban Green Space Survey, that was mentioned in the BOC March 2024 Newsletter. The original plan was that this survey was to be launched by BTO for 2025 but this is now postponed until 2026. To date, there has been much interest nationally, but more time is needed to consult with stakeholders and expand the engagement programme even further.

Evening Walk on the Berkshire Downs, 5th June 2024

Andy Tomczynski

Five of us started our walk in West Ilsley, heading up Cow Down on the footpath to the Ridgeway. It was overcast with some evening sunlight and good visibility, but as the evening drew in it became distinctly cool. Initially, there seemed to be a lack of birdlife, but as we walked beyond the short section of steep, bare chalk path and the down opened out in front of us, typical downland birds were heard and seen, with Corn Bunting, Yellowhammer and Whitethroat evident. We came across a fine looking, male Stonechat singing from the very top of an isolated Hawthorn. It kept reappearing as we walked up the down until we reached the Ridgeway where it was joined by two recently fledged juvenile Stonechats. We didn't see a female Stonechat. It was at this point, a week earlier, that I had seen a pair of Stonechats carrying food and attending a nest low in a grass tussock. Presumably these juveniles were a product of that nest.

Halfway up the track we scanned the Maize strip running up Sheep Down, on the far side of the large field to our west. With our 'scopes, we located two Stone Curlews on the stony ground of the Maize strip. This delighted three of our group who had never seen a Stone Curlew. Further up the track we were able to look down the length of the Maize strip and to our surprise we saw three Stone Curlew very close together. Two were pecking at the ground feeding whilst the other stood by. We thought, from their behaviour and subtle plumage details, that the group comprised an adult with two fully grown juveniles. We lingered a while looking at them giving great 'scope views. Later we heard numerous Stone Curlew calls as dusk encroached.

We reached the Ridgeway, scanned the fields and scrub, before retracing our steps back to West Ilsley. Half way down Cow Down we picked up a Short-eared Owl hunting over the gallops. An excellent bird to see in June, in Berkshire. We saw it drop onto prey in long grass. We hung around, and eventually saw it fly again and watched it as it crossed the large field towards Sheep Down where we saw it land on a post. As it flew over the field, we clearly heard its "song"; a triple hoot, or as described in Collins, deep hoots of "uh-uh-uh", something I had not heard before.

So, a rather good, enjoyable bird walk, although as my Bird Track App showed we had only seen 24 species.

An "Ancient" Bird Quiz

Elaine Charlson

Why not brush up your Latin (and Greek)?

1. Name three scientific names of birds which have a single part repeated, eg. *Puffinus puffinus*.
2. What bird is *Puffinus puffinus*?
3. What does *melanocephalus* mean (as in the name of the Mediterranean Gull)?
4. What bird is called *Garrulus glandarius*, and why?
5. In the Inspector Montalbano books, there are characters called Galluzzo and Gallo, what bird do these names imply that they resemble?
6. The Temminck's Stint (*Callidris Temminckii*) is named after Coenraad Temminck. What nationality was he?
7. What does *Caprimulgus* mean? ...and to which family of birds does this refer?
8. What feature of a Woodlark is referred to by *Lullula*?
9. *Charadrius alexandrinus* implies an origin of Alexandria in Egypt. What location is indicated by its English name, but is where the collector lived rather than where the bird is from?
10. What game is named after the Hobby?

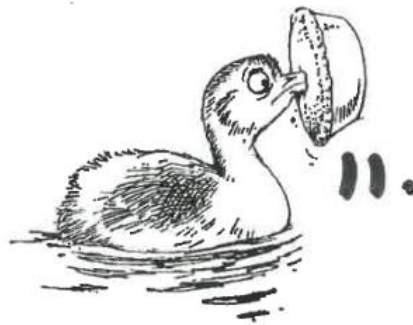
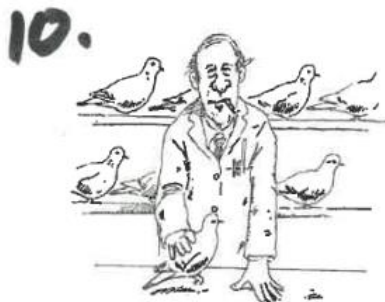
(Sources: Latin for Bird Lovers; Roger Lederer & Carol Burr; Timber Press, 2014
Lapwings, Loons & Lousy Jacks; Ray Reedman; Pelagic Publishing, 2016
Collins Bird Guide 3rd ed; Lars Svensson, Killian Mullarney & Dan Zetterström; William Collins Books, 2022)

Dingbatz

Jane Campbell

Not everyone made it to our 2023 Christmas Social and so will have missed this zany piece of Birding humour. Our thanks to Ralph Watts for collating the originals for presentation of this quiz at the feast. The answers will be provided in our next Newsletter; and to get you in the mood here's a starter for which the answer is "Kingfisher".





The Earley Green Fair, organised by Earley Town Council, has become a popular event for the local community. Around 50 local organisations had stalls on site at this year's Fair. The BOC Committee decided it might be a good place to represent the Club and let people know what we do to promote the study, enjoyment and conservation of birds in Berkshire. Four members set up and staffed the stall, which included interesting display-boards about the birds of Berkshire, books for reference and for sale, and birders to chat to.

As the Fair was located at the Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve we took the opportunity to encourage younger visitors to look for birds around the site, with a children's activity sheet including a photographic checklist.

It was a hot and muggy day but luckily our stall was well positioned in the shade of trees. We had a constant stream of visitors all day, and good conversations about birding with over fifty people, including several BOC members and friends old and new. Ten children took an activity sheet and over forty people took a BOC membership leaflet.

We made £62.50 in sales of copies of *Where to Watch Birds in Berkshire, Berkshire Birdscapes 1947-2022*, and a 2019 annual report.



Our four volunteers, Elaine Charlson, Sue Charnley, Peter Driver and Robert Godden, all agreed it had been a very enjoyable and successful day. Let's hope all their efforts will lead to some new members for the Club.

Administrative Affairs**Jane and Edwin**

Our Secretary Jane says: **The BOC Committee needs YOU!**

Ordinary Committee member required

The new committee will be elected at the AGM on November 20th. One ordinary committee member is required this year to fill the post left by Bob Lyle at the end of his three year term. We thank Bob for his contribution and are grateful he will continue to offer his NDOC walks to BOC members.

Indoor Programme Secretary required

Sue Charnley has provided us with a wonderful selection of indoor lectures over the last six seasons and has put together yet another terrific programme for the coming season. Sue wishes to retire from this role so again, we ask if anyone out there can help. This interesting role requires you to plan and organise the indoor programme for the 2025/2026 season onwards. The committee helps enormously with suggestions of speakers, it won't all be down to you.

Outdoor Programme Secretary required

Our outdoor programme also needs someone to organise it. Robert Godden has managed this for the last couple of seasons but really would prefer to pass it on. Again, you would be given help and it's important to know that you do not have to lead the events, just make sure they are organised.

I'd be grateful to hear from anyone who can help with these roles, or with anything else. Contact me at secretary@berksoc.org.uk or 07980076128.

While our Treasurer Edwin says: We are very keen that all members pay by Standing Order to save time chasing those who have forgotten to pay. If you don't already use this method perhaps you would consider doing so and thus avoid such issues; there's a suitable form [here](#) on our website, just fill it in and return it to Iain (address at foot), and we will then liaise with your bank to get your Standing Order set up.

Each year the Committee looks at whether subscriptions should be increased and has decided again to maintain them at £25 for Family members and £20 for Ordinary members for the year beginning 1st October 2024. However, the Club's costs have been rising and the Committee is looking at ways these can be reduced. If this is not achieved then there may well be a need for a significant increase after the next year of perhaps £5 for each category to reflect the high rates of inflation experienced in recent years.

From our Archives

Jane Campbell

I'm often amazed by items that I come across in our archives; take this example:

WINTERING SWALLOWS - BERKSHIRE

During October 1993 Mrs J Knight telephoned to say she had 4 young Swallows she had hand reared after falling out of a nest, one of which had a damaged wing and could not fly properly.

She did not know what to do with them, being afraid that the one with the damaged wing would not survive. I suggested that she take them to a local lake where other Swallows would be around and release them. The one with the damaged wing would have to take its chance. She was rather reluctant to do this but I told her that she should not delay any longer.

She then mentioned that she was soon to go to Portugal on holiday, so I said why not approach the airline to take them to release them there. At least the one with the damaged wing might survive and not have to fly far.

I thought this was the end of the story, but the following spring she rang me back to say that the airline would not take the birds, so she did not go on holiday after all and had kept on feeding the Swallows. It turned out that she put them in the spare heated room in the house and kept a light on all day. She put up perches and a feeding tray. Gentles were purchased for a steady supply of flies plus a food supplement she got from the vet.

The swallow with the damaged wing died during December, but the other 3 survived through the winter on a diet of flies, much to the annoyance of her husband. The following spring on the arrival of the Swallows back from Africa she released them at the local lake where I asked her to release them the previous Autumn.

An amazing story.

(Ed: Mrs Knight, where are you now?)



MARSH HARRIER: MOOR GREEN LAKES; 2Feb2024

© Andy Tomczynski

Quick Birdword Solution

Peter Driver

1		2		3		4		5
P	T	A	R	M	I	G	A	N
A		S		O		R		O
6								
S	W	I	F	T		E		C
S		O		7		A	P	T
E				C		T		U
8		9						
R	E	D	K	I	T	E		R
I		U		L		10		
						G	U	N
11								
N	O	C		L		R		A
E		K		A		E		L
12					13			
S	S	S	I		B	T	O	

Across

- 1. Cairngorm grouse (9)
- 6. A subject of 'the feather speech' (5)
- 7. Evolve (5)
- 8. Successfully reintroduced (3,4)
- 10. Toted by wildfowler (3)
- 11. Abbreviation of 5 (3)
- 12. Protected area? (4)
- 13. BBS organiser (3)

Down

- 1. Perching birds
- 2. Maybe *flammeus* or *capensis* (4)
- 3. Pied or White maybe? (9)
- 4. It's White and it's not Little (5,5)
- 5. Creatures of the night? (9)
- 9. Teal, Pochard etc. (5)



Turnstone: QMR; 5Jan2024



Yellow Wagtail: QMR; 24April2024



Fieldfare: Emmer Green Garden; 27Jan2024



Woodlark: Wishmoor Bottom; 26April2024



Curlew: Borough Marsh; 2April2024



Cattle Egret: Lower Farm GP; 11May2024

(Disclaimer: The views expressed in articles in this Newsletter are those of their respective authors and may not be representative of those of the BOC or of any of its Committee.)

And lastly, a message from your committee: We hope that you enjoyed the Summer Holidays and are looking forward to our Winter Programme.