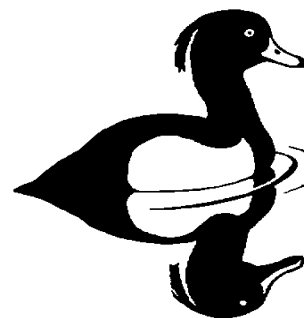


READING ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

ROC Newsletter

Winter 2001/2002

No 16



Introduction

Having enjoyed a good, lazy, family Christmas I have been struggling to get to grips with the newsletter this year, so it is a somewhat belated Happy New Year that I wish you all. I hope you all had a good Christmas and are now looking forward to a good year of birdwatching, hopefully unaffected by the sort of problem we suffered last year with Foot and Mouth.

For the ever increasing number of members who have access to the Internet, don't forget that the Club has its own WEB site (see <http://www.roc.care4free.net/>) which provides information about the club, pointers to other birding WEB sites and a number of excellent photographs by Gordon Langsbury.

For the first time I have sent out an electronic version of the newsletter (in Microsoft Word format) to those members who previously requested it. I hope that the recipients are happy with the format (I am sure they will let me know if not). If other members would like to receive the newsletter in this form please let me know by emailing me at the address shown below.

Another suggestion that has been put forward is a Club 'Birdline', whereby local bird sightings are quickly phoned around interested members. This normally means that you receive a call when a good bird is found locally and you ring the news on the next person on the 'line'. Please let any Committee member know if you are interested - if there is sufficient response it may be possible to set one up for the ROC.

Please send me any items you may have for the newsletter, all contributions are gratefully received and help to keep all members of the club informed (and sometimes amused). The cut-off for the next newsletter will be 22nd March 2002.

Ted Rogers (01344 883237)
8, Ranelagh Crescent
Ascot
SL5 8LW
Email:
ted.rogers@btinternet.com



Many thanks go to all contributors to this newsletter.
Illustrations courtesy of Kingfisher Publications plc.

Membership Reminder

Please note that subscriptions for the 2001/2002 Club year are now long overdue. If you wish to keep up your membership, but have not yet paid your subscription for the year please send your payment to the Membership Secretary or see her at an indoor meeting. If you don't wish to keep up your membership a note or call to the Membership Secretary would be much appreciated.

Dot Lincoln (Membership Secretary) - 0118 9427563

Members Evening – January 16th 2002

The Members Evening on Wednesday 16th January now has two scheduled speakers.

Norman Littleboy (last years Photographic Competition winner) with a talk on 'Nature in North Hampshire'

Chris Robinson (local BTO rep) on 'Recent Surveys in Berkshire'

Please come along for what promises to be an enjoyable evening.

Upcoming Midweek Walks

Midweek walks will continue on the third Thursday of each month, meeting at 10 am for a two hour walk. We want as many people as possible to enjoy these short, but sociable walks so if you would like a lift please contact Dot Lincoln or John Roberts.

January 17th – Moor Green Reserve

Meet in the car park at SU 806628. Expect mud and interesting birds. Will the Green Winged Teal still be there?

Leader: Dot Lincoln – 0118 9427563

February 21st – Twyford Gravel Pits

Meet in the 'Lands End' pub car park at SU 781749. After we have seen the Smew we can have lunch in the pub !

Leader: John Roberts – 0118 9482137

March 21st – Little Marlow Gravel Pits

Meet in Spade Oak car park at SU 884875, off A4155. Possible overlap of winter and summer visitors.

Leader: Harry Matthews – 01628 624440

Social Evening and Quiz Night

Thirty members and one guest attended the evening. Teams of three battled it out over the quiz and top dogs this year were Mike Taylor, Rob Godden and Martin Sell. Runners up were Brian Uttley, Marek Walford and Paul Bright-Thomas. Gordon Langsbury provided a series of photographs of "Birds of the Western Palearctic" to identify which became progressively harder. The most fiendish photograph this year was a simple portrait photograph of..... a Rufous Bush Robin. Peter Standley can look forward to a flurry of records from Asda car park in Lower Earley now that we have honed our identification skills of this species!

The entries for the print photograph competition were considerably lower than last year, John Andrews was awarded first and runner up places for the British Birds category and Dorothy Hargreaves first and runner up places for Birds Abroad.

Mike Smith

Editor's Note: For information, this is what the Rufous Bush Chat or Rufous Bush Robin or Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin (or whatever it's now called!) looks like in the guide books.



Suffice it to say that Gordon's picture was different enough to fool everybody!

Birding World and British Birds

Our friends Angela and Paul Harvey (who remembers his heroics with a bolting horse on Portland?) have left the area and we will miss them on trips and work parties. During the 'packing boxes period' Angela decided to pass on her many copies of Birding World and British Birds to the Club for possible sale. These are held by John Roberts and each yearly volume is for sale at a special price to members of £10. Contact John on 0118 9482137 if you are interested.

Birding World :-
1992 – 1998

British Birds :-

1987 (11 copies) – 1996 (1991 has 11 copies)

Costa del Theale

Whether it is due to global warming or simply range expansion I know not, but the Theale area played host to some remarkable birds this Autumn. Osprey records were higher than normal with passage birds being noted throughout September. At the beginning of the month two birds had broken their journey southwards with one fishing at the Pingewood gravel pits and a juvenile bird at Main Pit. This latter bird stayed all month providing many observers with spectacular views of it plunge diving and catching small fish.

On 10th September five Spoonbill were discovered at Pingewood and throughout the day they toured the various Theale pits, with many birdwatchers desperately trying to keep up with them. A single bird was re-found in the evening of the 16th and early morning of the 17th September, four birds were noted on the South coast and one presumes the party had split up. Little Egret records are now common place with up to four birds touring the Thames Valley corridor.



The winter duck season started with a bang (not a shot gun I hasten to add) with a Green Winged Teal at nearby Moor Green lakes (still present as we go to press), and at Theale a juvenile female Ring Necked Duck was found at Searles Lane soon followed by a stunning male Ferruginous Duck (both sporadically reported as we go to press). A supporting cast of two Red Breasted Merganser (Main pit), a pair of Goosander, female Smew (Hosehill) and male Red Crested Pochard (Searles Lane) seem ordinary by comparison.

Winter has not arrived until the Bitterns appear. Two Bittern were seen regularly at Hosehill in early December and a single bird is still present there. Up to seven Water Rail can be heard squealing at Hosehill as well. Sharp-eyed Brian Uttley noticed a Yellow Browed Warbler feeding with a Chiffchaff on the "Peregrine Pylon Island" in early December.

Mike Smith

Editor's Note: Sadly, despite several visits, I failed to see the Osprey. To make matters worse I also arrived just too late to see the Spoonbills!

Annual Photographic Competition

Time to start sorting out your prize winning entries, only three months to the next 35mm slide photograph competition! To keep the regular contributors on their toes, another new category this year to add a bit of variety to the proceedings. Gordon Langsbury has over the past few years commented on the fact that their has been a movement away from pure "portrait shots" of animals to photography that incorporates the subject into the habitat. So to replace the normal "Flora or Fauna" category is a new category "IN HABITAT". The essence of the category is to express the animal/bird/fungus/flower/whale whatever in their natural habitat. Again this year will be an "either or" mix of bird photograph entries between the British and Foreign birds. That is a maximum of six entries across both categories, i.e. British birds/Foreign birds (0/6, 1/5,2/4,3/3,4/2,5/1,6/0). The categories on 6th March will be as follows:

Birds of Britain	Max six entries
Birds Abroad	Max six entries
In Habitat	Three entries
Art in nature	Three entries
Worst Bird photograph	Three entries

Entry forms available at indoor meetings or by contacting me on 01189 413365 (best if you leave a message on answer phone during the day) - Mike Smith

Some Observations on the Mid Week Walk at Rickmansworth

It was a pleasant day for early November and the M25 was clear so we arrived at the Aquadrome about half an hour early. Just time to do some birdwatching around the car park.

At about 10 am the group set off down beside the canal towards the lock for the first patch and found that much of the standing water had frozen overnight. The trip continued past Stockers Lake and Inns Lake and on to Springwell Lake, where rather than retrace our steps the group decided it was such a nice day that we would extend the walk. So off we set to circumnavigate Springwell, it was rather muddy, but at the far end water rail were heard and close views of a goldcrest had by all. The route back included some more canal, the River Colne where the water rail was seen by all and Bury Lake.

Most people saw about 40 species including goldeneye and golden plover, but it was the lack of some species that surprised me, no fieldfare, redwing, redpoll or siskins, only two species of gull and a general lack of flocks of small birds – are these signs of warmer weather to come.

Harry Matthews

Ghostly Goings On in the Stour valley

From our Kent correspondent (7th September)

Reports have been received that a party of birders from the Reading area recently encountered a phantom bittern in the vicinity of Grove Ferry marshes national nature reserve. The party of four keen sighted ornithologists had fought though atrocious weather conditions to reach the nature reserve, but were fortune to meet a prolonged dry, if blustery, spell for their walk through the marshes and along the renowned Lampern wall to Stodmarsh.

From the vantage point near the car park know as 'the ramp' they had picked out a wide selection of ducks and waders, and had then set out westwards through the extensive phragmites reedbeds, where they had fine views of a peregrine falcon causing havoc among flocks of golden plover and lapwings.

It was here that the phantom materialised. According to a witness a bittern flew from the marshes, passed within 50 yards of the group, and dropped into the pools in front of the hide that ~~the group had just built photographs near of the~~ Reading party saw it, even though, as you know, flying bitterns in broad daylight are large, brown and obvious when viewed from 50 yards. Some, who doubt the existence of ghosts, say that the party was too busy watching a pair of bearded tits that chose this very moment to call and fly up close to the path, but the supernatural explanation is more plausible.

In the afternoon, unshaken by their close encounter with the paranormal, the group moved on to the Oare Marshes reserve on the Swale near the Isle of Sheppey. There, the weather gave them its worst with heavy driving rain for the whole afternoon, but from the relative comfort of the hides they watched a selection of species and stayed dry. As well as hundreds of common waders, redshanks, dunlin and lapwings, there were 7 greenshanks, several little stints, a party of ruff, and very large numbers of common snipe. Other birds found during the day included a late hobby, several cetti's warblers, 100s of swallows and a whinchat, making it a good day out. Pity about the bittern.

Bill Nicoll

A 'Pot Luck' Trip Ditty!

The call came on Friday 'Where are we going?'
The question was fair the programme was showing
Sunday was 'Pot Luck' to find the rare bird
So do we follow the crowd or separate from the herd?

Consulting with members lead to a worrying find
Rare birds were not around but most didn't mind.
So off we all went to Dungeness in Kent
In three cars we came in the pouring driving rain!

On the beach we were shocked the first hide was locked
So the long and windy trail to hide two must not fail
No lock (nor door) here so out did we peer
On the horizon did motor both Gannet and Scoter

Nearer to land but much closer to hand
where birds were much fewer was a Pomarine Skua
and out on the sea in line with a tankers hull
were several Black headed and yes, a Little Gull!

The rain did not stop so we had to decide
To go to the reserve and find a warm hide
Here we were stopping for coffee and shopping
But through weather like muck we spied Spotted
Redshank, Ruddy Duck

At last stopped the rain so to the main quest
The Observatory garden held a superb Firecrest
More birds were seen while it was still dry
Stonechat and Linnet, a Sparrowhawk passed by

But going home was not the end hence this ditty for you
penned
For the next trips we prepare, hoping for fresh air
But most of all we would like to see you enjoy
Our excursions for interested man, woman, girl and boy

Colin Wilson (alias Wordsworth II)

Shelducks in Berkshire

Last autumn I received the following letter from Alan Furlley. I believe that breeding Shelducks are very much on the increase in inland Britain, but I don't know how widespread they are in Berkshire. Have other members had similar experiences or observations?

Ted Rogers

Dear Ted,
Thought you might be interested that cycling west between Compton and E Ilsley on 3rd July, to my surprise on RHS of road around flooded area of field from winter rains were 2 adult shelduck and 9 grown young! Young were still in non adult plumage and scuttled into undergrowth on seeing us. Do you think they bred here taking advantage of flooded undisturbed field? Good nos of lapwing + young on other side of road where it clearly had been flooded and not touched by farmer.



News from the TABCG

At Hosehill the rafts have been brought in for the winter and the island taped up to prevent fouling by the cormorants. However the artificial island will need to be repaired with lengths of heavy conveyor belt, to prevent chicks falling into the water. The ditch at the west gate has been cleared out to prevent excess water getting into the site over the winter, and scrub has been cleared to improve the sight lines at the gateways and car park. A major work party cleared the main island, with some vegetation being left for cover. The weeding on the island was much easier this year, probably because most of the seeds got washed off when it was submerged last winter. The sand martin bank has been cleaned out, but only 13 nests were found (many fewer than last year). Also the nest boxes around Hosehill have been cleaned - of interest was a Hornets nest found in a box in the horse paddock. Generally there had been an 80% success rate in those boxes cleaned out.

On one of the work parties during the autumn an Osprey was seen – surely a good incentive for more people to come along and help out !



Concern was expressed about the lack of birds on Moatlands and Burghfield Mill. This was felt to be due to chemical damage to weed following the Sailing Club at Main Pit spraying earlier in the year. The residue was flushed through the gravel pit system. It was significant that Hosehill, upstream of the natural water flow, has had good weed growth and a disproportionate number of birds this year.

The Theale Area Bird Conservation Group always welcomes new members and anybody who can help out at work parties - please contact Brian Uttley for further info. (tel. Work - 01189 783783, Home - 01189 832894)

Information courtesy of TABCG (with thanks to Cathy McEwan)