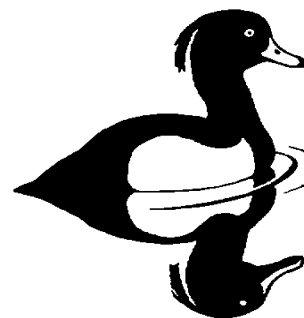


READING ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

ROC Newsletter

Spring 2004

No 25



Introduction

Welcome to the Spring edition of the newsletter although, given the amazingly early arrivals of some migrants, you could be forgiven for thinking that it must have arrived many weeks ago! I'm afraid I am little late sending it out, particularly as the Summer Garden Bird survey form is enclosed, and the winter forms finished at the end of March. I hope this will not put you off completing the new forms and also that you have completed the winter form and returned them to John Farnsworth – I am sure he would love to have some more data to process!

As I was working on this newsletter I heard an oddly familiar wheezing sound coming from the trees behind my house, which I eventually remembered is the sound that Bramblings use as an excuse for singing. We have had only sporadic visits by Bramblings this winter, but in the last week or so the numbers have risen and the visits have become more frequent. I can only conclude that the attraction is the excellent sunflower seed kernels that I bought from John & Lois Roberts at the last indoor meeting! The service will recommence at the indoor meetings later in the year, so please make use of the service and help to support the club (and your garden birds at the same time).

It is good to see that more of you are opting to receive the newsletter via email – if you would prefer to receive the newsletter by email rather than the post please let me know by sending an email to the address below. As always, all contributions to the newsletter are much appreciated – please get contributions for the next newsletter to me by 25th June.

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.

Can you help please?

We have two urgent vacancies for officers on the Committee.

One is the **Programme Officer**. The task has been undertaken by Carole White for several years, but she now feels she can no longer continue in the post. We are deeply indebted to Carol for all she has done for us in past years and give our grateful thanks and best wishes to Carole and Phil. Carole has already arranged next years programme so we are now looking for someone to help us with the 2005/2006 programme. This is not a very onerous task and consists largely of collating ideas from the President and the Committee, making contact with speakers and arranging them for appropriate meeting nights. A lot of help can (and will) be given.

If you think you have a bit of time to spare, would you please consider helping with this? Carole will of course show you the ropes and the whole committee will help you.

The second position has been vacant for sometime. This is **Publicity Officer**. To increase the membership of the Club we need to increase awareness of it and make sure the messages we send out are consistent with our aims. This job is as little or as much as you wish to make of it. It could be simply notifying local press and radio of meetings. It could be helping with Press releases and all forms of communication. Someone with a bit of marketing experience would be a real bonus but our aim is just to make sure we have greater local profile than we have now. Again time spent is limited unless you really want to make a difference and then you could make it more of a hobby! Please think about this. We can point you in the right direction and provide support – no-one on the Committee is placed under too much pressure – it has to happen at a volunteers pace.

If you are interested please call Colin on 01252 837411 (Mobile 07899 066687) and he can answer questions – no obligation arises from just asking!

**THESE POSITIONS ARE IMPORTANT TO OUR CLUB
– PLEASE VOLUNTEER AND HELP US MAKE IT
SUCCESSFUL.**

Photographic Evening

The annual photographic evening took place on March 3rd and attracted a good audience and nearly 100 excellent entries (apart from the entries in the Worst Bird Photo category of course!). In the absence of Gordon Langsbury, Dickie Duckett took over as judge and selected 1st and 2nd in each category, while adding useful and constructive comments on each of the entries. The evening ended with the audience voting for the best picture and prizes (courtesy of the President) being presented to all the winners. As in previous years it was a very enjoyable evening, thanks in no small part to Dickie's performance as judge (it at least prevented him from winning again!).

The winning entries were as follows:

Best Bird Photo:

1st – Richard Chaplin (Two Maribou Storks taking off from a tree top)

2nd – Mike Smith (Grey Heron)

Animals in Their Habitat:

1st - Dave Massie (African Elephant)

2nd- John Bleloch (Leopard in a tree at sunset)

Art in Nature:

1st – Mike Smith (Ice)

2nd – Alastair Mackay (Whooper Swans)

Worst Bird Photo:

Gerry Perry

Overall Winner was Richard Chaplin for his superb picture of Maribou Storks

Note 1: The Chairman would like to offer his profound apologies to Mike Smith for incorrectly reading out the wrong selection in the runners up spot for Best Bird Photo – he has been hanging his head in shame ever since!

Note 2: Now that many people are using digital cameras it is felt that it would be good to be able to accept entries in that format (we are currently limited to slides). At the moment we are not quite sure how we can best handle entries in digital form, but if anyone has any ideas how this could be done please let the Committee know.

Unidentified Member

On Oct. 1st 2003 our account received a subs payment of £15 from an unidentified source. Our bank will trace the source at cost of £5, but the payee could save us that cost. For our account to receive payment on Oct. 1st the originating bank will have acted on a date in late Sept. Please check your statements to see if your standing order was paid on a Sept. date and let me know. There is only one of you as all other payments were received on Oct 3rd.

John Roberts - Tel 0118 9482137

Moor Green Lakes

The Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve lies on the northern bank of the River Blackwater between Sandhurst and Eversley. This area is the result of careful restoration of a gravel extraction site into a reserve that combines a variety of habitats: lakes, islands, scrapes, woodland, grassland and hedgerows. A footpath that follows the western and southern boundary provides an opportunity for a peaceful stroll, and there are many vantage points for watching the varied wildlife along the way, such as the Goosanders in winter on Grove Lake, Roe Deer in the early morning mist or Kingfishers on the river.

However, the best views of the reserve are obtained from the hides on the shore of Colebrook North and Grove Lakes. The main hide on Colebrook North Lake overlooks a scrape and this attracts dabbling ducks and waders, providing close-up views and opportunities for photography. A few years ago, a Temminck's Stint spent a couple of days on this scrape allowing close study of its identification features. A little further away, an island in the middle of the lake is home to nesting terns and waders in the spring.

Access to the hides is offered through membership of the Moor Green Lakes Group. This group enables people to get more involved with the reserve. Subscriptions are very reasonable - only £3 p.a. for an adult or £5 for a family - and members receive an excellent annual report which covers sightings of birds, mammals, dragonflies, butterflies etc., and other information about the reserve, its management and the plans for its future.

An important aspect of the work of the Moor Green Lakes Group is the practical management of the reserve, and several members turn up for the Sunday and mid-week work parties that are organised to implement the reserve's management plan. Tasks include cutting back scrub and brambles to maintain the grassland, hedge-laying and clearance of islands to provide a suitable habitat for breeding birds. Volunteers on these work parties get an opportunity to see different parts of the reserve away from the footpath, and a real sense of making a positive contribution to the conservation of a very special area.

So if you are looking for somewhere new to visit, where better than Moor Green Lakes with its tranquillity and varied wildlife. Why not help to support the maintenance of the reserve by joining the Moor Green Lakes Group (via the Membership Secretary, 34 Mill Lane, Yateley, Hants, GU46 7TN). Otherwise, consider if you can offer some practical help on a work party - there's plenty to be done to maintain Moor Green Lakes in the state that so many of us enjoy.

Robert Godden (01252 872503)

News from the TABCG

Conservation work continues in earnest in preparation for the Spring migration and arrival of breeding species. At Hosehill the island has been cleared and nest boxes have been cleaned out and new ones put up. The work on the Sand Martin bank has been completed, with new mix being put into the nesting pipes, in the hope that the tremendous nesting success of earlier seasons will be repeated in 2004. Around the north west boundary some 10 native species of tree have been planted. At Moatlands the island has been cut and raked and some of the trees coppiced, with work carried out to enhance the spit and create shallow margins for waders.



The TABCG bird race is now in its 5th year. This very popular event consists of teams of 3 competing to see or hear as many species as possible in the designated 24 hour period. This year's event will be on Saturday 15th May. The entry fee is £3.50 per head. People are also encouraged to seek sponsorship, with proceeds going to TABCG and Friends of Lavells Lake. Please contact the organiser (Andy Horscroft - tel. 0118 9479771) if you are interested taking part.

Other upcoming events will be a guided general wildlife walk round Hosehill on 6th June from 10am till 12 noon and an evening event on 24th June looking for Bats and Moths starting at 9pm (organised in conjunction with the Kennet and Pang Valley Countryside project). All are welcome at both events.

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). The TABCG also meet on the first Tuesday of every month at the Englefield Social Club, a chance to meet other club members and listen to guest speakers.

Information courtesy of TABCG (with thanks to Cathy McEwan)

Upcoming ROC Events

Excursions and field trips continue through the spring and into the summer - please come along and join in with some of these trips and walks.

SUNDAY 18th APRIL - Isle of Portland, Dorset (Full day)
Meet between 8:00am and 10:00am at Portland Bill obelisk (SY676682).

Leader: Ted Rogers (01344 883237)

SUNDAY 2nd MAY - Stodmarsh and Grove Ferry, Kent (Full day)

Meet at 8:00am at Stodmarsh NNR CP (TR222609) or at 10:30am at Grove Ferry CP (TR235631).

Leader: Bill Nicoll (01344 455403)

SUNDAY 16th MAY- New Forest (and possibly Martin Down), Hampshire (Full day)

Meet at 9:00am at Bolderwood CP (SU243087)

Leader Martin Sell (01189 471170)

SUNDAY 30th MAY - Berkshire Downs (Evening trip)

Meet at 7.00pm at parking place, just beyond Starveall Farm, North of Aldworth (SU545810).

Leader: Martin Sell (0118 9471170)

FRIDAY 4th TO SUNDAY 6th JUNE - Wales and Anglesey (Weekend)

Leader: Colin Wilson (01252 837411) to find out more and reserve a place. **Please contact Colin by 16th April** to allow booking of hotels etc.

Midweek Walks

We meet at 10.00 am on the third Thursday of the month for a walk which lasts about two hours.

APRIL 15th - Thatcham Discovery Centre (and Lower Farm if time). We hope to see some early migrants, perhaps nightingales. Meet at SU 518 663. Contact Dot Lincln (0118 9427563) or John Roberts (0118 94821370)

MAY 20th - Bramshill Plantation looking for woodlark, tree pipit etc. Meet at SU 760613. Contact Ray Reedman (0118 9864338)

JUNE 17th - Mapledurham Woods. A pleasant walk in mature woodland and open fields. Meet at 71 Kidmore Road Caversham, sharing cars thereafter. Contact John Roberts (0118 9482137)

There will be no midweek walks in July or August, but walks will restart in September - see appropriate Newsletter for further details.

Feeding Swallow Survey

This summer, BTO are carrying out a survey to assess numbers of feeding Swallows and the types of habitat with which they are associated. The survey method is really simple and is one that any birdwatcher could easily do. If you've never done a bird survey before (or even if you have!) here's your chance to try one. A brief outline follows:-



- Each volunteer is allocated one tetrad (2km x 2km square).
- Two visits to each tetrad between 23 May and 11 August will be required. Ideally, both visits should occur at the same time of day – either both in the morning or both in the evening. A recce visit may be advantageous.
- Each tetrad visit requires observations from four points – at least three of which are to be at or close to the corners of your survey square, the other can be a point of your choice.
- At each observation point, the number of Swallow 'passes' and other relevant bird activity will be recorded during a period of ten minutes.
- Habitat details such as land use and boundary characteristics will be recorded, as well as basic weather details.
- The total time spent on each tetrad visit is likely to be approximately 1 hour for the bird counts and habitat assessment, plus travel time to and around the tetrad. You will require binoculars, watch and clipboard.

Berkshire has been allocated a good number of tetrads in all parts of the county. If you'd like to help, I'd love to hear from you! My telephone number is 01491 671420

Chris Robinson (Berks BTO Rep)

Berkshire Bird Index

2003 was a record year for coverage on the Berkshire Bird Index with an amazing 95 1km squares being surveyed within Berkshire. Many thanks to all ROC members who take part.

The BBI has now been running for 4 years and, despite having a depleted dataset for 2001 (the Foot and Mouth year), we felt that there should now be sufficient data for a proper statistical analysis of the population changes for the commoner species. To do this we used the same techniques and similar tools as for the BTO's Breeding Bird Survey, which are capable of making allowance for missing data for one or more years (i.e: due to lack of a surveyor). The recommendation from BTO was that any species which was recorded in 50 or more squares would provide statistically viable data and this enabled us to report on the 4-year population trend for 30 species.

The margins of error on most calculations were rather wide, presumably due to the still (in many cases) relatively small sample size and lesser coverage during the first two years of BBI. It is probably unrealistic, therefore, to rely too much on absolute figures at this stage but 7 species showed statistically significant population increases; while 4 more showed statistically significant declines. ["Statistically significant" simply means that we can be 95% certain that is correct].

The following table shows the position for the Top 30 most widespread species in Berkshire shown in order of

magnitude of change. Species in bold showed statistically significant change over four years:-

- Goldfinch**-↑
- Starling-↑
- Chiffchaff**-↑
- Song Thrush-↔
- Greenfinch**-↑
- Robin-↔
- Great Spotted Woodpecker-↑
- Long-tailed Tit-↓
- Woodpigeon**-↑
- Wren-↓
- Duncock-↑
- Skylark-↓
- Blue Tit**-↑
- Pied Wagtail-↓
- House Sparrow-↑
- Mallard-↓
- Pheasant-↑
- Great Tit-↓
- Blackbird**-↑
- Jackdaw-↓
- Collared Dove-↑
- Swallow-↓
- Mistle Thrush-↑
- Magpie**-↓
- Chaffinch**-↑
- Yellowhammer**-↓
- Whitethroat-↑
- Carrión Crow**-↓
- Blackcap-↑
- Green Woodpecker**-↓

Key:

- ↑ Increase (statistically significant)
- ↑ Increase (not statistically significant)
- ↔ No change (not statistically significant)
- ↓ Decrease (not statistically significant)
- ↓ Decrease (statistically significant)

Chris Robinson

Black Redstart Survey

Following on from last year's work with Black Redstarts in the centre of Reading, another survey is planned for this year, scheduled for early on Sunday 9th May. It has been known that Black Redstarts have been breeding in central Reading for some years, but this valuable survey work will continue to monitor how many birds are involved and how well they are doing, so this is a chance to get involved. If you would like to know more or want to take part please contact John Lerpiniere on 0118 9426225.

