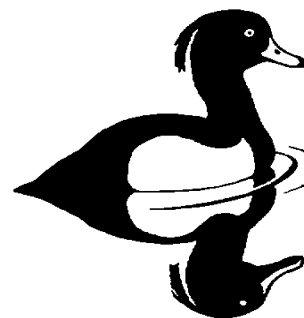


READING ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

ROC Newsletter

Winter 2004/2005

No 28



Introduction

As always, I am a bit late with this newsletter, but as I was away over New Year I have struggled to find the time to put it together. My thoroughly pleasant week in north Somerset was not great for birds, but did provide the best view I have ever had of a Raven, which, when seen so closely, reminded me why this spectacular (and somewhat sinister looking) bird played such a part in ancient folklore and Hammer horror films!

Excuses over with, all I can say is that I hope that you had a very enjoyable festive season and pass on best wishes for the New Year from me and the rest of the Committee. We look forward to seeing you at this year's Club events.

Please don't forget that the newsletter also depends on your support and I am always on the look out for items that will be of interest to other club members. The Spring newsletter should go out around the end of March, so can I ask that any contributions reach me by Friday 25th March.

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

Joint Indoor Meeting with Newbury Club

During the last few months the Club has been establishing closer links with the Newbury District Ornithological Club and you may have seen from your programme that we have scheduled a joint meeting with them for the evening of Wednesday March 23rd. Our speaker will be John Wyatt and this will be a Duck Identification Workshop.

John will be familiar to many Club members from his previous talks to us and is an excellent speaker and knowledgeable birdwatcher/photographer. This should therefore be a very informative, as well as sociable, meeting and we encourage all members to come and make this joint venture a success. By the way, John has also offered a follow-up field meeting sometime later this year to help put the theory into practice! More details will be announced later.

We have chosen a mid-way venue for this meeting (well, nearly!) which is the Brook Centre at Theale Green Secondary School. This is very easy to get to - coming from Reading or the M4, head west (towards Newbury) along the A4 and after crossing/exiting M4 junction 11 take the fourth exit at the second roundabout (normally known as the "Theale roundabout"). The school is a few hundred yards on the left (grid ref. SU636712). If you are coming from Newbury along the A4 (towards Reading) take the second exit at this roundabout.

Chris Robinson

Photographic Competition 2005

The Photographic competition continues this year, on 23rd February, with the introduction of a new category for digital images. See below for full details and rules.

We are continuing our successful competition for slides, but will have just three categories: Bird Portrait (perched or in flight); Birds in their Habitats (e.g. a small bird image in a relevant habitat); Composition and Form (not necessarily birds, but wildlife or nature subjects).

In addition, we are including for the first time, a digital photography section with a single category for best bird picture.

Each of the four categories will be judged and winners chosen by Gordon Langsbury. The meeting will then, on a show of hands, choose the overall winner who will win the Gordon Langsbury Cup, currently held by Richard Chaplin for his Maribou Storks winner in 2004. Other prizes will be announced closer to the time.

This is one of our most eagerly awaited evenings and we hope many of you, including digiscopers, will take the opportunity to enter their pictures. Digital images need to be sent by email or CD at least two weeks before the event, but slides may be delivered on the evening (please bring them as early as possible to assist administration of the event). Good luck to all taking part - let's hope 2005 will find yet another wonderful selection of new images to delight us all.

Overall rules

1. The competition is open to paid up members of the ROC. New members may join on the night if they wish.
2. No more than three entries per category per entrant.
3. Entrants agree to winner and runner up photographs being displayed by the ROC on its website and used for publicity purposes, at the Club's discretion. The ROC will make reasonable attempts to ensure acknowledgement is given to photographers whose work is used in this way.
4. Photographs will be judged by Gordon Langsbury based on all factors including exposure, colour cast, focus, composition and form.
5. Photography related prizes will be given in all categories for first place and second place and the overall winner will also win the Gordon Langsbury Cup.

Digital section

1. Photographs will be of birds only (including 'in habitat' images).
2. Limited image manipulation is permissible but no cloning of the bird image itself. Accordingly, adjustment to exposure, sharpening, colour correction, sensor dust spotting and cropping and resizing is acceptable. It is not permissible to clone any part of bird images, or copy or pass off other people's work.
3. Images should be resized if possible to 1024x768 and 72dpi. If images are not of this size they will be adapted by the ROC without responsibility for the results.
4. Closing date for entries is 9 February 2005. No changes or additions can be considered after that time. Images should be emailed to colin.wilson@theroc.org.uk or sent on a CD to his home address: Blakeney, St. Catherine's Road, Frimley Green, Surrey, GU16 9NP. Any questions please telephone 01252 837411.
5. The pictures will be placed in Microsoft Powerpoint and shown as a slide show. Portrait pictures will be expanded to full page height.

Copies of IBIS

Michael Pallas-Clarke has just given the ROC a set of IBIS from 1991 (vol 133 (i)) to 2004 (vol 146 (4)), which we are offering in return for a donation to the Club's Conservation Fund. If anyone is interested, please contact me (renton.righelato@theroc.org.uk or phone 0787 981 2564). For those unfamiliar with it, IBIS is the journal of the British Ornithologists Union and is one of the major journals of avian science.

Renton Righelato

Programme Changes – Field Trips

Please note that the trip to the Forest of Dean which was scheduled for Wednesday 23rd March will now take place on Thursday 24th March. This is to avoid a clash with the indoor meeting on the Wednesday evening – a joint meeting with the NDOC (see other item in this newsletter). Please contact Colin Wilson for details of this trip.

An additional field trip is planned to take place on 1st May, an early morning bird song recognition walk at Dinton Pastures, aimed particularly at beginners or anyone who would like to become more familiar with the songs of our various summer visitors. More details will be available nearer the time or contact Ted Rogers for details.

Mid-week walks January to May 2005

All walks take place on the 3rd Thursday of the month and start at 10am, but it is advisable to phone the contact no. just before the day to check that there are no alterations to the programme.

20th January. Twyford Lakes, hopefully for smew and wintering finches. Meet in the rear car-park of the Lands End pub (**SU781748**) and pop in afterwards for a drink or a meal. Contact: John Roberts on 0118 948 2137

17th February. Greenham Common. Often big flocks of wintering thrushes are here, or will they be heading north by now? Meet in the Control Tower car park (**SU499651**). Contact: Pat Martin on 01635 866206.

17th March. The Lookout, (Heritage Centre) Bracknell at SU876661. Plenty of opportunity for a variety of walks and habitats from here at this start of the exciting Spring season, so the actual direction will be decided on the day according to what's about. Contact: Harry Matthews on 01628 624440.

21st April. Snelsmore Common. Meet in the car-park near the Mary Hare school (**SU464710**). John Wilding of NDOC has kindly volunteered to lead this walk in an area unfamiliar to many of us and we are inviting members of that club to join us. Many summer bird visitors should be singing and maybe we'll get wood warbler and tree pipit. Contact: Ray Reedman on 01189 986 4338

19th May. Paice's Wood, near Aldermaston at SU587639 (entrance through the Young Industrial Estate) This new nature reserve is unknown to most of us, but John has done stalwart conservation work here, and says there should be lots of bird song, and plenty of wild flowers and butterflies. Contact: John Lerpiniere on 0118 942 6625

(**June** – it remains to be seen if we can arrange something at a time when many of us are away on holiday.)

Phone Dot Lincoln on 0118 942 7563 or any of the contact nos. if directions or more information is required.

Recorder's Report to the ROC 2004 AGM

It was wetland habitat which produced the most interesting records at the beginning of 2004. As well as the usual sprinkling of Little Egret records there were several reports of wintering Bitterns in the county and at Lower Farm GP the massed ranks of roosting Golden Plover reached 1500. Gull watchers were rewarded with sightings of both Mediterranean Gulls and Caspian Gulls at several sites and an Iceland Gull at Queen Mother Res was possibly the same wintering bird returning for its sixth year. A Bearded Tit at Theale Gps was some reward for the extension of the reed bed habitat there as a result of conservation work over several years. The rarity highlight of these first two months was a Green-winged Teal at Dorney Wetlands.

On the Downs there were up to 5 Short-eared Owls, a Great Grey Shrike which stayed to winter and a reassuring count of 110 Corn Buntings, a species that has been in national decline. Elsewhere in the county reports of Merlin came from four locations and there were high numbers of Redwing and Fieldfare. Crossbills were also much in evidence in conifer woodland.

Following the pattern of recent years some summer migrants were early to arrive, with Chiffchaff, Wheatear, Sand Martin and Little Ringed Plover all reported by mid March followed by Swallow, Yellow Wagtail, Sedge Warbler and Willow Warbler before the end of the month, by which time breeding of one resident species was well advanced, with Egyptian Geese broods reported from five locations. Among rarer birds in March were White Stork, Common Scoter, Kumlien's Gull and Kittiwake.

Spring passage in April and May was quite well marked this year with waders prominent, some 25 different species being recorded including Avocet, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwit, Temminck's Stint and only the third record for the county in a hundred years of Dotterel, at Bury Down. Other scarce migrant species included Osprey (now pleasingly seen every year on passage), Little Tern, Ring Ouzel and Pied Flycatcher. It was also a good year for Little Gull passage with parties of up to 27 being seen.

Whilst passage birds provide a welcome excitement for observers it is important that we try to establish the status of our breeding birds, particularly against the backdrop of worrying national declines over recent decades in a number of species. One habitat which was thoroughly surveyed in 2004 was the heaths and woods of East Berkshire. This work by Derek Barker revealed healthy populations of a number of species including 39 roding Woodcock, 46 Nightjar territories, 23 singing/pairs of Woodlark, 40 Tree Pipit territories (well down on the 122 found in the peak year of 1999), 20 Redstart territories, 64 singing Song Thrushes, 19 Dartford Warbler territories, 221 singing Chiffchaffs but only 115 Willow Warblers, well down on 2003. Surprisingly for this type of habitat he also located 28 Spotted Flycatcher territories. The highlight of the survey, however, was the finding of 73 singing males or

pairs of Firecrest, a nationally significant population figure.

Elsewhere in the county there were many reports in summer of Buzzard,



active Black-headed colonies at three sites, Cetti's Warblers all along the Kennet Valley and an attempt by Peregrines to move into the centre of Reading. Unusually there were many large gulls about in June, up to 30 Herring Gulls and 380 Lesser Black-backed Gulls, although hard evidence of suspected local breeding has yet to emerge!

Late summer/autumn produced records of a number of locally rare species including a Gannet in July (which sadly did not survive), a Pectoral Sandpiper in August, Arctic Skua, Great Skua (only the ninth for Berkshire but which also did not survive) and Spotted Crake in September, Leach's Petrel in October and Long-tailed Skua and Snow Bunting in November.

As it is ten years since the cut-off date (1994) for records for inclusion in the Birds of Berkshire avifauna, I feel it appropriate to conclude my report with a brief look at some of the more significant changes that have occurred in the ornithological landscape over the 15 years since the Berkshire atlas work was undertaken and subsequently published in the avifauna. The top ten species which appear to have been the most successful, and the bottom ten that haven't, are I suggest the following.

Upward top ten

1. Buzzard - in 1990 breeding/probably breeding in 7 tetrads; 2004 nearly everywhere.
2. Dartford Warbler - in 1994 2 singing males; in 2004 over 20 territories.
3. Firecrest - present in about 14 tetrads in 1990; in 2004 73 singing males/territories just in East Berks.
4. Cetti's Warbler - in the 1996 census 16 singing males; in 2004, without a census, probably double that number.
5. Black-headed Gull - in 1994 one recent nest; in 2004 2 large colonies and one small one.
6. Little Egret - by 1994 there had been just 5 county records; in 2004 recorded nearly every month with a party of six in July.
7. Curlew - in 1994 one pair in one location; in 2004 several pairs in several locations.
8. Peregrine - in 1994 there were 7 sightings, one in June the rest in September to December; in 2004 present all year and sightings now regular.
9. Raven - in 1994 there were just 2 sightings (the first since 1985); in 2004 sightings regular throughout the year.
10. Egyptian Goose - in 1994 two breeding records; in 2004 at least 5, probably more, breeding sites.

And the downward ten

1. Tree Sparrow - in 1990 present on 61 tetrads and breeding or probably breeding in 40 of those; in 2004 just two isolated sightings so far and no breeding reports.
2. Redpoll - in 1990 bred or probably in 25 tetrads; in 2004 no summering records yet received.
3. Wood Warbler - in 1990 breeding or probably breeding in 24 tetrads; in 2004 just one passage record so far.
4. Snipe - in 1990 found in 57 tetrads with confirmed or probable breeding in 26; in 2004 no summer records at all so far.
5. Hawfinch - in 1990 found in 16 tetrads, breeding or probably breeding in 12; in 2004 just one lone sighting so far.
6. House Martin - in 1990 present in summer in 95% of tetrads (ie 306); in 2004 absent from many former sites and much reduced numbers in others.
7. Willow Tit - in 1994 reported from over 10 sites as far east as the Loddon; in 2004 apparently now confined to the higher ground in west Berkshire.
8. Corn Bunting - in 1990 probably or actually breeding in 100 tetrads; in 2004 confined to the Downs and the White Waltham area.
9. Swift - in 1990 confirmed or probably breeding in 160 tetrads; in 2004 appears much reduced with loss of traditional nest sites in older buildings apparently a factor.
10. House Sparrow - in 1990 present in 975 of tetrads (380); in 2004 a reduced population but by how much?

After that somewhat depressing list of declines it is worth noting, however, that as the habitat and species Biodiversity Action Plans of Berkshire's Unitary Authorities begin to have an effect (eg the Swift is being targeted by Bracknell Forest Borough Council) this should help to improve habitats for locally breeding birds through such measures as heathland and reedbed habitat creation. The new farming subsidy scheme which will now include non-agricultural habitat such as scrub and marginal areas should also begin to benefit farmland species.

It will be important that we monitor those changes and I end my tenure as Recorder not only acknowledging with thanks all the records that continue to be received but also with an appeal for observers to continue to submit their bird records and if possible to carry out also some survey work aimed at determining the densities of breeding species in their area so that change if it takes place can be detected.

Peter Standley

The Story of the Christmas Social

For various reasons, I had never previously attended one of these evenings, but I am so glad that I broke that habit! It turned out to be great fun and not a little challenging...

In informal teams of about four, we settled with drinks and snacks to a quiz that challenged knowledge, wit and

ingenuity in a series of topic-based rounds, presented by a genial and ingenious quizmaster, Neil Bucknell. Having unravelled folksy and archaic bird names like *Stormcock* and *Dishwasher*, we then had to recall the colours of intimate bits of assorted birds: few, it seemed had peered into a Guillemot's gape! If this was not sufficiently esoteric, plumage parts and European breeding ranges furrowed more than a few brows. By sheer luck I had just been reading an Ian Wallace article on sub-species and was on firm ground (for once!) with the Irish Red Grouse as the most westerly of the three game birds on offer. Of the bird-themed film titles, the one made in 1991 concerning an East-Midlands petty criminal was so neatly and swiftly translated by our team-leader, Martin Sell, into *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves* that he left us open-mouthed in admiration! By this time several teams were creeping out into open space ahead of the rest.

We replenished plates and settled back for Gordon Langsbury's decisive photo round, with all to play for...

This is the evening when the maestro of the camera loves to underline that there is a lot of "error" in "trial and error", because he intersperses the wonderful shots of rarities and more accessible birds with some of those that resemble what most of us take. We all recognised the syndrome, if not the bird, in the shot of the Red Grouse's inelegant posterior: it might easily have been the Guillemot's tonsils! Likewise an apparently headless and tailless Hen Harrier filmed in rich and colour-distorting light gave rise to intense - and mostly inaccurate - speculation. Among the rarity shots, even an Isabelline Shrike didn't fool some. However, it was a most intimate and well-lit picture that engendered some of the hottest debate: was that Twite a Linnet after all? Opinion was sharply divided.

From the point of view of the competition it didn't matter a lot. Marek Walford, Fraser Cottingham, Paul Bright-Thomas and Chris Robinson had been too strong for the rest of us and had a clear six-point win, though the next few teams were close enough to each other for honour to be satisfied.

The inter-round snack-breaks threw down a different sort of challenge, as John Roberts had furnished a celebrities picture quiz that was eventually closely contested by Mike Taylor and Paul Cropper. A raffle added to the bottles and boxes of chocolates that were borne off at the end of the evening by the winners.

It had been a wonderful "no fuss" evening, smoothly hosted by Colin Wilson and the quizmasters, whose efforts we all appreciated greatly. For Carole White, her committee swan-song had been to organise the booking and catering for the evening, for which she and her aides deserved our thanks.

As for me, I enjoyed myself immensely and shall not be missing the most interactive meeting of the year in future.

Ray Reedman

Addendum to the Christmas Social

While it makes no difference to the outcome of the result at the ROC Social, the debate about a bird in the identification section raged on after the night and expert views were sought. Gordon Langsbury had taken a lovely image of an immature bird which he recollected was in a flock of Twite. When the picture was shown the assembled throng's views were split between a Twite and a Linnet. The answers were marked on the basis it was a Twite but after a little banter between the participants expert views were sought. See the bird for yourself here!



The bird was found in October 2003 on Islay and Gordon consulted Malcolm Ogilvie the local Recorder, who after a short while came back with his view it was a Linnet. Our own new County Recorder Chris Heard, was also consulted. He also concluded it was a Linnet. Chris commented 'The extensive grey tones to the head do not occur on Twite, which shows a warm brownish-buff head and breast, with long dark streaks on the flanks. Plus the bill is the wrong colour (in Twite it is conspicuously yellowish-buff with a darker tip in winter; and more-or-less all dark in summer).'

So, we now know the answer and those who chose Twite can remove a point and those who chose Linnet can add one! The outcome will only be that the winning team won by an even bigger margin! I suggest you read the 'Story of the Christmas Social' to find out who they were!

Colin Wilson

(With apologies to all those seeing the picture in black and white!)

Letter Received from the Friends of Lavell Lake

Dear Colin/Renton

Please pass our enormous gratitude to the Birds of Berkshire Conservation Fund and all at the ROC, for your generous donation to FOLL may we offer a huge thank you.

I am assured that our new sluice that you have kindly offered a huge donation so that we can pay for it, is finally about to be completed.

It has already proven to allow a recently flooded lake to drain out of Lavell's a lot quicker than before, some modification to ensure a better seal on the door itself will have the job completed.

It now appears possible that under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, we may well qualify for a rebate on our investment, which could mean more money available to go towards more Phragmites reed beds, better paths and hides.

The new sluice will mean Lavell's breeding birds have an even better chance of success in 2005 onwards. Perhaps over the next few years and, as the extended Phragmites reed beds are established, we will discover an optimum lake water level to attract more Bitterns in winter?

The Phragmites reed bed expansion plans have already begun and will continue to in various areas. As some of you have witnessed, even with the little areas of reed we have currently, we have had 2 wintering Bitterns on more than one occasion in the past. We have at least 6 Water Rails present now, so I can easily envisage many more birds wintering at Lavell's in future.

We hope to get agreement on plans for new raised paths, better hides, additional viewing positions, including the new feeding area. Ideally Lavell's needs a Members Only hide too, as they have proven to be highly successful at Moor Green and provide an income, which can be reinvested back into future projects.

Your money in paying for that sluice will make Lavell's even better, thank you again.

Our web page, is live, please pay us a visit at: www.friendsoflavells.freeola.com

If you or anyone would like to email me on fraser1947@hotmail.com

Yours sincerely
Fraser Cottington
FOLL Chair Person & Bird Recorder

Club Bird Surveys

At their last meeting and in response to feedback received from our recent Membership Questionnaire, your committee has decided to undertake two Club bird surveys in 2005 – one for Kingfishers and the other for Woodpeckers. We didn't know it at the time but this year the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) will be carrying out a Scarce Woodland Birds Survey (SWBS).

There are eight target species qualifying as scarce, one of which is Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, but surveyors will also be asked to record another twenty species including the other two Woodpeckers - Green and Great Spotted (Smart Alecs can be quiet about Wrynecks!)

In light of this, we now propose to integrate our Woodpecker survey with the Scarce Woodland Bird Survey. All eight scarce species are known to have bred at some time in Berkshire and we believe this will be an excellent opportunity to find out more about their current status as well as that of several other scarce Berkshire species which the "Berkshire Bird Index" does not cover well.

The eight scarce, target species are: Firecrest, Hawfinch, Redpoll, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Redstart, Tree Pipit, Willow Tit and Wood Warbler.

The other twenty species are: Blackcap, Bullfinch, Chiffchaff, Crested Tit, Dunnock, Garden Warbler, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Green Woodpecker, Goldcrest, Marsh Tit, Mistle Thrush, Nightingale, Nuthatch, Pied Flycatcher, Siskin, Song Thrush, Spotted Flycatcher, Treecreeper, Turtle Dove and Willow Warbler.

The survey is really simple and easy to do - volunteers choose two woodlands which can be as big or small as they like and of any type (coniferous, broadleaved or mixed). One wood should be known to be 'good' for commoner woodland specialists and hopefully (!) contain at least one of the eight target species while the other should be of similar type (i.e. also broadleaved or coniferous and with a similar range of growth stages) and either known to be 'poor' or 'status unknown'. The survey visits (two to each wood are required) will take the form of "woodland walks" through or around each wood. Surveyors choose the route and length of these and record (on a supplied, large scale map) the position of any of the 28 species which they see or hear. As an added bonus, all surveyors get a CD to help identify songs and calls of their woodland birds! As well as the main survey, BTO are asking for records of casual sightings of the eight scarce species (not just in woodland) so people can participate at one of two levels. If you would like to take part in either survey or would like to know more please contact Chris Robinson (tel: 01491-671420 or email: berks_bto_rep@btinternet.com)

The Kingfisher survey will be run separately, is even easier and we hope all Club members will want to take part! All we need is information on any Kingfishers you see or hear between now and the end of July. Records can be from anywhere in Berkshire. If possible, please record all the following information:-

Location (with grid reference if possible)
Date and time of sighting/hearing
Number of birds seen/heard
Any notes on behaviour, etc.

Please send your records to me at 2 Beckfords, Upper Basildon, Reading, Berks, RG8 8PB or, if you are in the electronic age, email chris.robinson@theroc.org.uk

For both these surveys we will be "combining forces" with the Newbury District Ornithological Club and other Berks birders in order to get as big a coverage as possible.

Chris Robinson

Fobney Island: News Update, December 2004

With the help of Reading Borough Council – many thanks to Adrian Lawson and his team in Parks & Open Spaces - work has started on Fobney Island to explore how it could be developed into a wetland reserve: reed-beds, shallow pools and wet meadow. The island is the land between the Kennett and Avon Canal and the River Kennett, just to the West of Fobney lock at SU706711. Over the next year we will be doing exploratory work to determine the most practicable ways of creating wet habitats.

In order to monitor flooding more easily and to provide surfaces that may attract gulls, waders and ducks, part of the site has been mown and some areas rotivated. We also drilled a number of holes to get a picture of the subsoil structure and will be monitoring the water table at five spots through the next year. November and December have been relatively dry and so far the water table is well below the soil surface. During this winter we also hope to plant a willow screen between the Kennett bank and the interior of the island and to install owl boxes on the South bank of the river.

It is important to start now building up a database of the wintering, passage and breeding birds using the site, before any changes are carried out. Current wintering species include reed bunting, meadow pipit, stonechat on the rough grassland and good numbers of goldfinches, greenfinches, bullfinches in the scrub and trees along the banks. Little Egrets are seen in the area and I would expect many more wetland species when the site floods, as I am confidently informed it will, over the next month or so.

We need help in building up records of all bird species so do please visit and keep a note of what you see. Help is also wanted to monitor other fauna and the flora of the site. If you can help, please contact me or send in your records. Try the walk along the Canal bank that takes you on from Fobney through wet meadowland on to the gravel pits at Burghfield and Theale, with the Cunning Man pub conveniently placed for refreshment. There is a car park at Fobney Lock, but beware! It is subject to a lot of vandalism; I often park by the roundabout on the A33 (SU712714) and take the footpath along the river.

Renton Righelato

ROC Trip to Titchfield Haven Bird Reserve - August 2004

Titchfield Haven can always be relied upon to fill the 'Bird Watchers' note book at any time of the year, and our visit was no exception! With at least 50 different species sighted it makes it seem that all the birds we could possibly see in that area were seen.

On arrival in bright somewhat blustery conditions with the tide half in or was it half out, Turnstone, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Ringed Plover, Snipe, Herring, and Great Black-backed Gulls were quickly picked out feeding along the littoral line, by the keen eyes of the experienced members.

The first hide en route was the Meon Hide from which we could add Black-tailed Godwit, Avocet, Lapwing, Snipe, Dunlin, Green Sandpiper, Teal, and, as I was reliably informed, an immature Shelduck. The battery of telescopes revealed a distant Kestrel and, would you believe, a 'juvenile female' Marsh Harrier. Moving on and round the lake I should mention sightings of the ubiquitous Dunnock, Stock Dove, Wood Pigeon, Canada Geese, Cormorant, Mallard, Heron, Moorhen and Coot.

No mid Summer would be complete without the low flight of Martins and Swallows feeding over the water, but seeing several Little Egret helped the Haven to



live up to expectations. Moving to the West Hide, Willow and Garden Warblers were in evidence, flitting in the cover of reeds and bushes and possibly Reed Bunting also. Those with experienced hearing could add the sound of the Cetti's Warbler to their tally.

For the more fastidious members of our party the distant sighting of a Buzzard must not go unmentioned and for the sake of completion Magpies, a Crow or two, Green Woodpecker, Chaffinch, Robin, Wren, Pied Wagtail and yes, Starlings, along with Long Tailed, Blue, and Great Tit in various modest numbers must be listed.

To top off the day a 'charm' of Goldfinch, a Sparrowhawk, three Whitethroat, a Hobby, albeit somewhat distant for those of us still telescopically challenged, and the pundits declared sighting a Mediterranean Gull. What more could anyone wish for ! Yes, you have guessed it cream cakes and tea at the Haven Centre Café!

If I have failed to note every bird that each member of the party identified then my apologies, but this is my 'maiden' article for the Newsletter.

Roger and Rosalind Stanley

News from the TABCG

At Hosehill four channels have been cut into the reed beds to improve them for Bittern. All the nest boxes have been cleaned - 2 were unused, 4 contained field mice, 1 had a Hornets nest and 1 contained a Shrew. 1 contained an unhatched egg and six were badly infested with mites indicating they may have had dead chicks in them. The Dragonfly Pond was also the subject of a major work party with the centre section being cleared of encroaching vegetation on the bank and in the pond itself. The East Meadow has been cut and raked and another area on the bank has also been cleared in this way. An unwanted visitor was a jet skier who tried to use his ski on the lake, but was soon made aware of the error of his ways! The Fox and Hounds pub now has a new landlord, but as before he is happy for members to use the Car Park, provided that they remember to park at the back of the Car Park and, if not using the Pub, ensure they leave before the busy lunch period.

At Burghfield Mill nest boxes have also been cleaned and the ditch between the Mill and Moatlands Pit has been cleaned to cope with the autumn and winter rains. Willow has been cleared from some of the margins and some of the reed beds cut.

At the November indoor meeting representatives of Prudential met again with the Group and presented primarily on Drainage and Water Management issues. This was followed by a question and answer session.

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)

Berkshire Bird News

August

A pair of Ravens were at Combe Gibbet on the 1st. The four Little Egrets were still at Pingewood GP on the 2nd with one or two there throughout August. Another flew over Lavell's Lake on the 4th when a juvenile Garganey was at Pingewood GP. The next day a juvenile Wood Sandpiper was at Moor Green Lakes (till 13th) and three Garganey were at Pingewood GP. Things were a little quiet till the 12th when Black Terns were at QMR and Lower Farm GP (till 24th) and a Ruff and two Garganey were at Pingewood GP (till 31st). A Black-tailed Godwit was at Pingewood GP on the 14th. The next day there were two Greenshank (into Sep) and another Black-tailed Godwit at

Pingewood GP (till 25th), a Ruff at Moor Green Lakes, a Turnstone at QMR and two Little Gull at Theale GP (till 19th with one 20th). On the 16th a Greenshank was at Moor Green Lakes and three Sanderling were at QMR. The next day a Pied Flycatcher was at Wishmoor Bottom. On the 19th there were three Turnstone and four Sanderling at QMR and a Black Tern at Theale GP (till 20th). The next day there was a Sanderling at QMR. On the 24th there was a Wood Sandpiper at Pingewood GP. An adult Pectoral Sandpiper (previously seen at Staines Res. in Surrey) was at Pingewood GP on 26th (into Sep). The next day there was a Ruff at Pingewood GP. On the 28th a Raven was seen over the M4 near Yattendon, a Honey Buzzard was reported flying south over Widbrook Common and the feral White-fronted Goose was seen at Theale GP. The next day there was two Sandwich Tern at Lower Farm GP. On the 30th there was a Pied Flycatcher in Prospect Park, Reading.

September

Birds lingering from August at Pingewood GP included the Pectoral Sandpiper (till 3rd), two Greenshank (till 7th with one remaining till 13th) and Ruff (till 9th). On the 1st an Osprey was seen flying south-east over Lavell's Lake and then a few minutes later over Winnersh. The next day there was a Redstart at Dorney Wetlands (till 3rd), an impressive 42 Black Tern were at QMR and a male Montagu's Harrier was at Brightwalton. A Tree Sparrow, now a rare bird in Berks, was at Dorney Wetlands on the 4th. Two Garganey were at Pingewood GP on the 5th with three there the next day. A Sandwich Tern was at Dinton Pastures on the 7th with a Garganey there the following day. A juvenile Spotted Crake was at a private site in east Berks (9th and 10th). On the same day there was an adult and a first-winter Mediterranean Gull (with the adult remaining the next day and seen gain on the 17th), four Sandwich Tern and a Wryneck at QMR; Greenshank at Theale GP, and three Pintail at Moor Green Lakes. On the 11th a Curlew Sandpiper (till 15th) and three Little Stint (till 13th with one remaining till 23rd) were at Pingewood GP. On the same day a Marsh Harrier flew west over Woolhampton GP and was later seen continuing west over Lower Farm GP and an Osprey flew over Moor Green Lakes. The next day two Knot were at Pingewood GP. On the 16th two Ospreys were seen at Moor Green Lakes with a single bird there over the following two days. On the 18th a juvenile Arctic Tern was at Dinton Pastures (till 23rd) and a female Redstart took up residence in a Caversham garden (into October). Another excellent garden bird was a Firecrest in Forest Park on the same day. On the 22nd a skua at QMR was reported as an Arctic before being correctly identified the following day as a juvenile Great Skua. Sadly it was found dead on the 27th. Amazingly some observers watching the Great Skua also saw five Arctic Skuas fly over! The month ended with a Short-eared Owl and a Rock Pipit at QMR on the 30th.

October

The adult Mediterranean Gull was seen at QMR again on the 1st and the Redstart left it's Caversham residence on the 2nd after a stay of 15 days! The same bird, or another appeared in a Reading garden on the 4th. On the 6th a Firecrest was in Prospect Park, Reading. On the 8th a juvenile Arctic Tern was at Theale GP. On the 10th A Great Grey Shrike was at Slough SF and a female Pintail was at Dinton Pastures with a male nearby on the River Loddon on the 15th. On the 16th the second seabird of the autumn was at QMR in the form of a Leach's Storm-petrel. In contrast to the skua the petrel was seen to fly off west. The next day an adult Little Gull was at Dinton Pastures and a Jack Snipe was at Pingewood GP. On the 18th a Jack Snipe was at Lavell's Lake. On the 22nd an Oystercatcher was at Theale GP. On the 26th a female Merlin was at Binfield. On the 30th a Short-eared Owl was at Bury Down and on the 31st a Great Grey Shrike was seen briefly at Wishmoor Bottom.

November

Up to three Short-eared Owls were seen regularly at Bury Down. A first-winter Caspian Gull was at QMR on the 4th. On the same day a Black-necked Grebe and three Red-crested Pochard were at Wraysbury GP and a male Merlin was at Cold Harbour (seen regularly throughout November). A Bittern at Lavell's Lake on the 6th raised hopes that the site would host another wintering bird but it disappeared on the 9th. The feral White-fronted Goose was at Theale GP the same day. The next day a Firecrest was at Lavell's Lake. On the 8th 90 Common Scoter were at QMR. On the 12th a Long-tailed Duck was at Woolhampton GP. The next day a very confiding pair of Snow Bunting were at Combe Gibbet (till 14th with one remaining till 18th). A Ferruginous-type duck at Theale GP the same day was eventually identified a week later as a Ferruginous x Pochard hybrid. The next day a juvenile Scaup and a Common Scoter were at Woolhampton GP when the first Smew returned to Wraysbury GP. On the 17th a male Merlin was at Binfield. On the 21st adult and first-winter Caspian Gulls were at Pingewood GP (till 23rd). Further Caspian Gulls were seen on the 24th when there was a first-winter at Lea Farm, Sanford, another first-winter at QMR and a fourth-winter at Burghfield GP. A ring-tailed Hen Harrier was at Combe Gibbet the same day and a Little Egret was at QMR. On the 27th adult and first-winter Caspian Gulls were at Lea Farm Pit. The next day seven Red-crested Pochard were at Wraysbury GP.



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