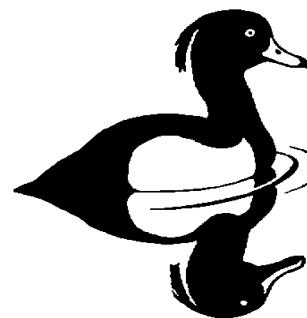


# READING ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB

## ROC Newsletter

Autumn 2005

No 31



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### **Introduction**

This newsletter comes as part of the Club’s annual membership pack, with an array of inserts. As always the committee has tried to put together a varied and interesting calendar of events, which I hope you will find of interest. Ray Reedman has been busy putting together an excellent indoor programme to complement the wide variety of outdoor trips and excursions. Hopefully we will see you at some these events.

The membership pack also includes the recording sheets for the winter part of the Garden Bird Survey that I hope you will be able to complete and return to John Farnsworth in due course. In the light of the expansion of the BTO Garden BirdWatch survey, the future of our own garden bird survey has been discussed and as a result, as part of this newsletter, there is further information and a chance for you for you to register your views on this matter – please take the time to let us know what you think. On the reverse of the slip there is also space for you to provide email and phone numbers so that the Club can keep its records up to date – we do have some of this information already, but need to fill in some gaps and check the accuracy of what we have. In both cases, if you prefer, you can use email to send the information to us.

The next newsletter will go out around the start of next year, so items need to be with me by Christmas.

Ted Rogers (01344 883237)  
8, Ranelagh Crescent  
Ascot  
SL5 8LW  
Email: ted.rogers@theroc.org.uk



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

### **Message from the Membership Secretary**

The 2004 – 2005 season has been a really successful one, with over 60 new members added to the list, currently running at 230 plus (the total increases a little almost every week, largely due to the publicity campaigns). Now is the time to renew your membership unless you are a very recent joiner.

The easiest way to maintain your membership is to pay by Bankers Order for the start date of 1<sup>st</sup> October – there is a renewal form enclosed with this mailing which includes an application for this: the Treasurer and the committee favour this option! The alternative is to pay by cash or cheque at one of the early season indoor meetings or to post a cheque to me (address on the form).

Please also fill in all the details of name, address, telephone no. etc as fully as possible as this way I can check that all my lists are up-to-date and accurate. As in previous years, to save queuing, cash or cheque can be placed in a clearly labelled and sealed envelope and handed to me and the receipt can be collected later.

Many of you signed the Gift Aid form last year and this was of considerable financial advantage to the club. If you are a taxpayer please consider doing this if you have not already done so (it costs you nothing). You do not need to sign a second time but it does not matter if you do! The Gift Aid section may be signed whichever subscription method you use.

I look forward to receiving all your subscriptions promptly and not having to send out any reminders!

Dot Lincoln

### **Your Bird Records**

The ROC has proudly managed the production of the Birds of Berkshire Annual reports for many years. The submission of records of bird sightings is obviously vital to this as it's the core material.

We need your sightings and observations to make the report as valuable as possible. Currently, the vast majority of bird sightings are of rarities or semi-rarities, once found and publicised many people go and find them and report them through the variety of methods available. But we don't get many records of the commoner species. All of them are valuable, especially evidence of breeding, large numbers and notes about behaviour.

You can record your sightings in a variety of ways.

- [www.berksbirds.co.uk](http://www.berksbirds.co.uk) is the fastest way to input your records to the county database. Just go to the home page and go to the Recording page and follow instructions
- submit your records to Berks Bird Bulletin. Send paper records, spreadsheets etc to BCS, PO Box 680, Maidenhead, Berks, SL6 9ST or to [brian.clews@btconnect.com](mailto:brian.clews@btconnect.com) by 10<sup>th</sup> of the month following the month of sightings.
- Maintain your own spreadsheet of records (example spreadsheets on [www.berksbirds.co.uk](http://www.berksbirds.co.uk)) and pass them to [colin.wilson@theroc.org.uk](mailto:colin.wilson@theroc.org.uk) at the end of each year – the deadline for inclusion in an annual report will be advised as work commences but 31<sup>st</sup> March following the year end is requested.
- Fill in the paper forms handed out at ROC meetings (an example is attached to this Newsletter) and pass them to Colin or any Committee member at ROC meetings as you fill them up or send them to him as soon as you can after the end of the year. They will then be added to the database.

Please note that sensitive sightings, e.g. rare breeding birds, such as Stone Curlew, Montagu's Harrier, Long-eared Owl etc should be sent direct to the Recorder, Chris Heard at 3 Waterside Lodge, Ray Mead Road, Maidenhead Berks, SL6 8NP or Assistant Recorder, Derek Barker at 40 Haywood Gardens, Woodlands Park, Maidenhead, SL6 3LZ.

To understand what to put on bird records please read your latest Birds of Berkshire Annual report (1998-99 version should hopefully be with this Newsletter) and you'll see the variety of information collected and used. Records of common birds are very welcome, you only have to look at some of the species accounts for common birds to see how few items are provided – something we can all help to improve.

Good luck with your birding in the new season and please start sending in your records as soon as you can.

Colin Wilson

### **Moor Green Lakes**

If you have visited Moor Green Lakes recently you will probably have noticed some of the improvements made over the Spring, such as the resurfaced footpath from the car park to the river. The scrapes have also been rejuvenated and together with better control of water levels, the benefits in terms of improved habitat for passage waders are already apparent, with sightings of ringed plover, black-tailed godwits and wood sandpipers.

But there is plenty more to be done, and we are hoping that there will be a good turn out of volunteers for the winter programme of work parties. The Sunday work parties fall on the second Sunday of the month from September through to March, and there are also Tuesday work parties on dates still to be decided. If you can manage any of these dates even for just a few hours it will be appreciated. Meet at the main car park on Lower Sandhurst Road by 10.30, and bring a packed lunch if staying for the day.

2005 Dates:      Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> September  
                     Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> October  
                     Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> November  
                     Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> December  
                     Tuesday dates TBD

Check your diaries now!

Robert Godden (01252 872503)



### **The Birds of Berkshire Conservation Fund**

The profits from the sales of *The Birds of Berkshire* atlas and avifauna are held by the Reading Ornithological Club in a fund dedicated to bird conservation. After making five grants in 2002/5 totalling £2,846, the fund available now stands at approximately £3,300. The Birds of Berkshire Fund will probably be exhausted within a year or two; so, the Club has created a new fund and we welcome donations to continue our support for bird conservation in Berkshire.

Over the last three years grants have gone to:

- The **Newbury Ringing Group** with a grant for its work on birds of the reedbeds at Thatcham and elsewhere.
- **Lavell's Lake** nature reserve with a grant for a sluice to give better control of water levels, to help breeding birds and enhance bird-watching from the hides.
- Kennet Valley Project with a grant to protect an area of open land at **Paices Hill**, near Aldermarston for ground-nesting birds like Lapwing and Little Ringed Plover.
- Barn Owl nest boxes at **Moor Green**.
- The **Berkshire Atlas Group** for bird survey work the revision of the county Atlas and Avifauna.

### **Conservation Fund - Call for Proposals: Winter 2005/6**

The Club is now inviting proposals for winter 2005/6 from local organisations or individuals for grants to support bird conservation work in Berkshire in general and for projects involving wetlands in particular. It is unlikely that individual grants will exceed £1,000.

Proposals will be judged against the following criteria:

- Is the site within Berkshire (essential) and does it contain wetland or have relevance to wetland or wetland species (desirable)?
- Will the project help locally threatened species to breed or winter more successfully?
- Will the project have long term benefits for wildlife and/or habitat, based on (i) the expected life of the work done or purchases made, (ii) the extent to which they can be subsequently protected and (iii) the level of support the project will receive and that required to secure a reasonable life expectancy?
- Will the grant result in increased benefit to users of the site?
- Project management: Is there a convincing plan for the execution of the project and its subsequent maintenance. What measures are being taken to ensure value for money; for example, how much of the work is to be done by volunteers, have donations "in kind" been obtained.
- How important is the grant to the success of the project (what other funding is available or being sought; what will happen if a *Birds of Berkshire* grant is not awarded)?

Proposals for consideration in Winter 2005/6, stating the work to be done and the conservation benefits it will provide and addressing the above criteria, should be sent to the Secretary who can be contacted for further information (Renton Righelato, 63 Hamilton Road, Reading, RG1 5RA; tel 0787 981 2564; email [renton.righelato@theroc.org.uk](mailto:renton.righelato@theroc.org.uk) by 30<sup>th</sup> November 2005. Application forms can be downloaded from the ROC website ([www.theroc.org.uk](http://www.theroc.org.uk)) or from Renton Righelato.

Applications will be judged by a committee representing the authors of *The Birds of Berkshire* and the Environment Agency, which provided support for its publication

### **ROC Trip Reports**

#### **Trip to Pagham Harbour and Selsey Bill – 4th May 2005**

Six of us met near Selsey Bill at 7:30ish for the customary sea-watch until 9:00.

The wind was NW and it was overcast but the visibility out over the channel was very good.

Gannets of varying ages could be seen fishing for long periods but at some distance from the shore. Great Northern Diver and Fulmar were seen passing and there was the possible sighting of Great Skua but this could not be confirmed.

Common, Arctic, Sandwich and Little Terns were noted just off the shore, some of these being at the Church Norton spit later in the day.

The group re-assembled at the visitor centre at Sidlesham, checked the Ferry Pool and the Long Pool where we heard a Cettis explosive call. The final part of the trip was centred on Church Norton where a good selection of waders was seen, notably Whimbrel and Little Ringed Plover. In all, 67 species were seen.

John Lakin

#### **Trip to Grove Ferry and Stodmarsh – May 2005 - "More than just a Hobby"**

Last year's trip to this lovely part of Kent produced an almost unbelievable number of Hobbies, but it is quite possible that this year's trip exceeded it! Although no real count was taken there was a huge number of these wonderful falcons hunting over the marshes. – certainly almost any binocular view contained up to 7 or 8 birds! To get such views of this spectacular bird was a real treat.



Although the hobbies were probably the highlight of the trip we were not short of other excellent birds. Waders were in short supply, being limited to a few Redshank, Greenshank and Ruff, but compensations came from good views of Bearded Tit, Nightingale and various warblers.

We met at the Grove Ferry end of the walk and made our way via the hides to the path along the River Stour where we gently headed up the river to the Stodmarsh reserve. On a lovely sunny day it was a pleasure to be out and the birds along the way added to the enjoyment. Marsh Harriers were much in evidence, hunting over the reed beds and the song of the Cetti's Warbler exploded from almost every patch of bushes and scrub. We expected to find Yellow Wagtails on the various wet meadows, but surprisingly the only one was located half way up a tree in an area of woodland!

The return to the cars took us on a slightly different route and a visit to one of the hides at Grove Ferry which provided us with the pleasure of a male Garganey on the pool, while the river-side trees held several singing Turtle Doves. A fitting end to a very enjoyable walk. Thanks go to Harry Matthews for stepping into the breach as leader after Bill Nicoll had to drop out.

Ted Rogers

### **Trip to Otmoor – 29th May 2005**

On Sunday May 29th a group of about 10 assembled in the small car park at Otmoor, an RSPB reserve well hidden in deepest Oxfordshire. Otmoor lies in a marshy basin about 10 miles east of Oxford, where the RSPB and the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust have a large land holding in one of the most wildlife-rich areas in the South East. Water levels are being allowed to rise and farmland is being acquired, to allow the area to return to its pre-war glory of rough grazing and marshland.

Indeed, the first field on entering the reserve is being allowed to return to scrub and is becoming a good site for breeding Grasshopper Warblers, and we saw one briefly singing at the top of a hawthorn bush. Cetti's Warblers are singing and several Turtle Doves were calling – a peaceful sound less frequently heard in the South East these days. Walking along the dykes to the far end of the reserve can take an hour at a leisurely pace, with stops on the way, but there was plenty to see – Garden, Sedge and Reed Warblers and Whitethroats everywhere. At least three Hobbies were in hot pursuit of dragonflies and we saw two broods of Pochard, a Shelduck or two, a couple of Ruddy Ducks and a little Egret.

There were also breeding Redshank and Lapwing, although the latter have been heavily predated by foxes. Higher water levels, the warden told us, could improve their prospects in future years.

Several Cuckoos and a soaring Sparrowhawk, plus Red Kite and Buzzard, made for a very satisfactory morning's birding. This area has huge potential and gets better by the year.

Finally, and by no means least, there are plenty of dragonflies for the entomologist and large areas of Water Violet, a scarce and very attractive fenland plant, to interest the botanist.

Martin Sell

### **ROC Garden Bird Survey**

#### **Winter Period 2004/2005 (the 11th winter survey)**

A welcome number of forms (and letters) were returned, 47 gardens being surveyed (72% urban/suburban, 28% rural) producing a total of 63 species (44 urb./sub., 56b rural). One new species was added to the ROC list during the period, red-listed (high conservation concern) **Grey Partridge**, 2 (=1 pair?) in lucky DF's garden on Maidenhead w/b 27/2/05. A pair of Red-legged Partridge was also recorded in one rural garden a few miles from Maidenhead (our own!) w/b 27/3/05.

Other notable records were 8 Waxwing in CG's garden in Reading (RG7) w/b 27/2/05; amber-listed (medium conservation concern) species included (*Lesser Redpoll*, *Firecrest* and *Kingfisher*); other red-listed species were **Reed Bunting**, **Linnet** and **Yellowhammer**.

In general terms compared to recent winter period surveys (all gardens combined); slightly reduced (distribution) records were received for **House Sparrow**, Coal Tit and Rook; moderately reduced records for **Bullfinch** and Brambling; and appreciably reduced records for Siskin and Pied Wagtail. In comparison; slightly increased records for Sparrowhawk (see also the Table below), Buzzard and *Stock Dove*; and moderately increased records for *Redwing* (see also the Table below) and *Red Kite*. The percentage occurrence figures for the greater number of species will be tabulated in a later newsletter, however I have calculated the weekly variation in occurrence for selected species as presented in the Table below, with brief comments as follows.

**Blackcap**: Occasional records up to 28 November then at more or less constant high level till w/b 13th February (due to N European wintering immigrants?) thereafter increasing to a max. for most of March (due at least in part to migrants from the South?) then starting to reduce from w/b 27 March.

**Sparrowhawk**: Recorded in every week with a weekly max. of the order of 20% of all gardens on several gardens, the overall occurrence in the winter period being in 64% of all gardens (71% urb./sub., 46% rural). If assumptions are made e.g. that an individual recorded in one garden is different to individuals in other gardens then the total number of individuals could be a minimum of 30+ Sparrowhawks associated with the Reading area as bounded by peripheral gardens (but not to be taken as the minimum population in Berks.) I hope to do more analysis of Sparrowhawk at a later date.

**Fieldfare**: Recorded as from w/b 31 October in all weeks until w/b 20 March, the occurrence reaching only double figures in a few weeks within that period.

**Redwing:** Recorded slightly earlier than *Fieldfare* (w/b 10 October) and in most weeks until w/b 20 March, the occurrence reaching double figures particularly w/b 12 December to 6 March, also including over 30% in early January.

**Chiffchaff:** Decreasing records from w/b 30 October until w/b 24 October thereafter occasional (overwintering?) records until w/b 27 February (migrants from South?) then slightly increasing as from w/b 20 March (presumably referring to migrants from the South).

**Brambling:** As mentioned above, relatively few records compared to recent years, from w/b 13 February to the end of the survey period.

**Summer Period 2005 (the 6th summer survey)**

Please return the forms by end of November if possible to allow timely analysis.

**Winter period 2005/2006 (the 12th winter survey)**

The recording form is enclosed with this newsletter - enjoy yourselves!

John (with more than a little help from Fiona) Farnsworth

**ROC Garden Bird Survey Table – Winter 2004-2005 (the 11th winter survey)**

Week beginning Sunday	Oct 3	Oct 10	Oct 17	Oct 24	Oct 31	Nov 7	Nov 14	Nov 21	Nov 28	Dec 5	Dec 12	Dec 19	Dec 26
Blackcap		2%					2		7	4	7	7	5
Sparrowhawk	2	15	9	17	9	7	19	7	9	11	7	20	12
<i>Fieldfare</i>					9	2	5	4	5	2	4	2	12
<i>Redwing</i>		5		5	11	5	9	7	7	4	13	22	26
Chiffchaff	15	5	5	2		2		2				2	
Brambling													

Week beginning Sunday	Jan 2	Jan 9	Jan 16	Jan 23	Jan 30	Feb 6	Feb 13	Feb 20	Feb 27	Mar 6	Mar 13	Mar 20	Mar 27
Blackcap	9	7	4	9	7	5	14	16	14	24	23	20	9
Sparrowhawk	7	7	4	13	7	11	9	5	7	7	11	2	7
<i>Fieldfare</i>	14	9	4	9	11	7	5	7	5	9	5		
<i>Redwing</i>	33	35	22	24	25	23	19	27	27	19	9		
Chiffchaff						2			2			4	4
Brambling							2		2	5	2		2

Figures in the table are the percentage number of gardens (all types combined) in which the species was recorded in a given week

**ROC Member Information Request**

Please complete and return to the Membership Secretary (at an indoor meeting or by post to Dot Lincoln at 43 Brooksby Road, Tilehurst, Reading RG31 6LZ):

**Your name**.....  
**Your phone number**.....  
**Your email address**.....

Do you wish your Newsletter to be sent by email? YES / NO (delete as necessary)

Please note: these details will only be used for contacting you about Club matters and will not be shared with any other party without your express consent.

Allowing us to send Newsletters by email saves the Club significant costs for copying and postage

Thanks very much.

**Note:** If you prefer you can email this information to [dot.lincoln@theroc.org.uk](mailto:dot.lincoln@theroc.org.uk) and [ted.rogers@theroc.org.uk](mailto:ted.rogers@theroc.org.uk)

**‘ROC Garden Bird Survey’ Survey**

The ROC committee have been considering the future of our Garden Bird Survey (GBS). We are aware that it has value in that it involves members who would not normally do so in bird surveys and that it provides potentially useful bird records from areas (i.e. urban or suburban) which might not otherwise be recorded. However, since our survey started, the national Garden BirdWatch (GBW) run by the BTO has expanded enormously and because it is based on count, as well presence, of a species is able to provide more detailed results. At the moment BTO have 74 Garden BirdWatchers close to Reading (Postcodes RG1, RG2, RG3, RG4, RG5 and RG6), with 364 participants within the RG postcode. This compares with less than 50 for the whole of Berkshire from the ROC survey and we are wondering whether we could be utilising their information. BTO are happy to provide us with their data (some of which, incidentally, will have come from ROC members because they do this survey as well!) and work with us on the analysis of specific requirements. The survey method is slightly more complex than GBS but it would potentially enable us to report much more “useful” information such as numerical trends with at least some degree of statistical reliability. One drawback to BTO Garden BirdWatch is that it costs £12 per year to participate, although you do get a very good and informative quarterly newsletter as part of the package!

We would like to consult the ROC membership on what we see as the possible options:-

1. Existing ROC Garden Bird Survey (GBS) participants should be encouraged to convert to BTO Garden BirdWatch and we drop GBS. The BTO would then do the data analysis for us if a statistically viable dataset size can be achieved
2. “Beef up” ROC Garden Bird Survey (GBS) to use the BTO Garden BirdWatch (GBW) methodology and then add the GBW results to the analysis. ROC would probably have to do all of the analysis as the GBS data could not be accepted by the GBW database
3. Stay as we are

Whatever you decide, we will be continuing our policy of running other county-based bird surveys, such as this year’s Kingfisher survey.

**Whether or not you currently participate in the ROC Garden Bird Survey**, please vote for one (only!) of the following and either send your results to Renton Righelato, 63 Hamilton Road, Reading, RG1 5RA or bring to the next ROC meeting or email to [renton@righelato.net](mailto:renton@righelato.net).

**Please return results by October 31<sup>st</sup> 2005.**

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Discontinue the ROC Garden Bird Survey and encourage members to move to the BTO Garden BirdWatch survey	
Retain ROC Garden Bird Survey but change survey method to that of BTO Garden BirdWatch	
Don’t change anything	
Other suggestion (please specify)	

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_