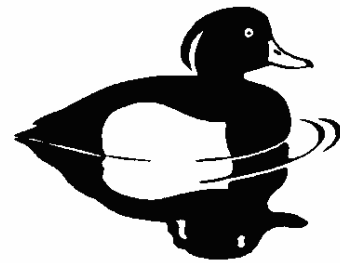


# BOC Newsletter

Winter 2007

No 40



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## Introduction

I hope you all had a good Christmas and New Year. For most people it is an enjoyable time, but I have to admit that, in some ways, it is nice to get back to the usual routine in January. Once all the Christmas paraphernalia has been cleared away and all the empty bottles and paper and packaging dutifully delivered to the recycling area, life can return to normal.

I am very fortunate where I live as my immediate neighbour is an avid feeder of the birds (heaven knows how much he spends on bird food!). I'm sure that my more modest feeders benefit from visits by birds en route to his feeding station. This winter has seen large numbers of siskins and numerous bramblings, as well as other finches, including a few redpolls. Along with the other regular garden visitors, the garden is normally alive with birds, apart from when the sparrowhawk pays us a visit of course.

Garden birds certainly give much pleasure to many during these dull winter months - hopefully the BOC programme of indoor meetings and outdoor excursions will also bring some pleasure. I hope that you will be able to join us for some of the upcoming events and look forward to seeing you.

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Thanks go to all contributors to this newsletter, with most illustrations courtesy of Kingfisher Publications plc.

## Upcoming Trips

The Club calendar for this year features a variety of outdoor trips and excursions – hopefully you will be able to attend some of them. Of particular note are two trips that require transport and ticket arrangements to be made well in advance, so an early response from likely attendees is much needed :-

**A trip by coach to Dungeness on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> April** should provide a great opportunity for us to catch up with a wide variety of spring migrants. Expected cost will be £17 per person. In order to decide on the viability of the coach we need to know numbers. **Please contact Ray Reedman (on 0118 9864338) as soon as possible (or by 14<sup>th</sup> March at the latest) if you would like to come along.**

**A boat trip along the Purbeck cliffs on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> June** will provide wonderful views of the variety of nesting seabirds (subject to weather), but we need to ensure the availability of tickets for the boat in advance. Travel down will be by car, but the boat tickets cost £10.50 per person. **Please contact Ray Reedman (on 0118 9864338) as soon as possible (or by the end of March at the latest) if you are interested.**

### **BOC Annual Photographic Competition March 19th 2008**

We are pleased to invite entries for the competition this year. We are delighted that Dave Cromack, Editor of Birds Illustrated, will again join Gordon Langsbury FRPS as judges for the competition which should lead to some lively debate and discussion.

The full 2008 rules are attached, but this year we will be only showing digital photographs (no slides) and entries are limited to five in each category, as opposed to four in 2007.

There will be prizes, including vouchers and a choice of book from Dave Cromack and, in addition to the Gordon Langsbury Cup, a year's subscription to Birds Illustrated for the overall winner.

**So please submit your photographs by 10<sup>th</sup> March** by email or CD to Colin Wilson (as outlined in the rules).

We look forward to seeing you there, whether a photographer or not, to help us choose the overall winner. Past winners are shown on our website and we hope the quality we have seen in the past will be reflected yet again.

### **BOC Photographic Competition 2008 Rules**

This year, 2008, we are offering 3 categories in our competition. These are:

- Best digiscoped bird (portrait or action shot)
- Best digital bird portrait
- Best digital bird action photograph

Each of the three categories will be judged and winners chosen by Gordon Langsbury and Dave Cromack. The meeting, on 19 March 2008 will then, on a show of hands, choose the overall winner who will win the Gordon Langsbury Cup, currently held by Mike McKee for his Pallid Swift.

#### **Overall rules**

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

#### **Digital rules**

- 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.
- The images, regardless of file size, image size and resolution will be adapted by the BOC for presentation as well as possible but without responsibility for the results.

Closing date for entries is 10 March 2008. No changes or additions can be considered after that time. Images should be emailed to colin.wilson@berksoc.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. The pictures will be placed in Microsoft Powerpoint and shown as a slide show. Portrait pictures will be expanded to full page height.

### **Membership Reminder**

Those of you who were at the adjourned AGM will know that our membership is steadily increasing and we now have 272 individual members or families on the list - that's the good news. Less good is the fact that 38 people have not yet renewed their membership for the 2007-2008 season. Fees were due from the beginning of October 2007, so this is a reminder to all those who are overdue, that payment early in the New Year would be much appreciated and will save me having to send out individual reminders at the end of January. If you can't get to meetings (unfortunately I won't be there myself on 9th January) you can always pay by cheque : my details are on the programme card)

Most of you of course have renewed promptly, a fact that is helpful to the smooth running of the club and is much appreciated both by myself and the Treasurer.

Dot Lincoln

## **AGM 2007**

Faced with poor weather and England playing in the European Cup semi-final, we were just short of a quorum (50 members) for the 2007 AGM, which had to be adjourned. In the event, English football enthusiasts would have been better off at the BOC meeting! The AGM was reconvened three weeks later, on 18<sup>th</sup> December, at Dinton Pastures Country Park, the bitter cold held at bay by a roaring log fire. Thanks to the 14 hardy members who took part!

This was the first AGM of the club as the Berkshire Ornithological Club. The name change had been formally completed in May and membership continues to grow, county-wide.

Our Treasurer, John Roberts, reported that the Club's finances were sound, with a modest surplus of income (£9,595) over expenditure (£8,703) and a cash balance of £9,625 at the year end (much of this is earmarked for report production). No change in membership subscriptions is proposed for 2008. The Birds of Berkshire Conservation Fund balance was £4,649 and the fund is open to proposals for grants.

With no-one due to retire and no new nominations, the Executive Officers (Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer) were re-elected and the Committee unchanged.

The Committee was charged with looking again at the quorum rules in the constitution, which have twice led to postponement of an AGM in the last few years. A quorum of 50 is equivalent to about 15% of the membership. Should we reduce it; or should we make more effort to ensure a popular meeting? If you have views on this please let me know. I would also be keen to hear from anyone interested in taking on the job of Secretary –new blood after six or seven years is probably a good thing.

President Gordon Langsbury closed the meeting, thanking all the Officers and Committee for making 2007, our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, so successful.

The full Minutes of the AGM are on the Club website – [www.berksoc.org.uk](http://www.berksoc.org.uk)

Renton Righelato ([renton.righelato@berksoc.org.uk](mailto:renton.righelato@berksoc.org.uk))

## **Colour Ringed Meadow Pipits**

Meadow Pipits are common breeding birds in the UK but surveys indicate the population has declined by around 38% between 1970 and 2005. They are relatively common on migration in Berkshire but are now relatively uncommon breeding birds and winter records tend to be of scattered small daytime groups.

Meadow Pipits are winter visitors to Padworth Common and a roost was discovered on the Common in February last year, numbers varied between 20 and 50 birds and the roost was abandoned by 28 March – presumably when the birds left for their breeding grounds. This winter the roost was first noticed on 4 November, when at least 40 birds were present. Birds have been caught for ringing in the pre-roost gathering and a catch in November included a bird we had originally ringed at the roost in February so we have already proved a degree of winter site fidelity.



Colour ringing greatly increases the chances of birds being found away from the roost site and allows more information to be collected on the birds and their habits so we have just started a project to:

- Colour ring between 50 and 100 birds each winter for a minimum of three winters
- Carry out monthly surveys whilst the roost is active of nearby local sites in an attempt to identify feeding areas
- Establish estimates of the number of birds using the roost during the course of a winter and turnover of birds
- Increase the chances of identifying breeding locations and migration routes.

The birds are being marked with a unique combination of rings so each bird will be identifiable – there will be a metal ring over a colour ring on the right leg and two colour rings on the left leg. If you see any Meadow Pipits can you please check to see if they are colour ringed and if they are can you let me have details of when and where you saw them and the exact combination of rings. I will reply promptly with ringing and sightings details of the birds concerned.

The ringing project on Padworth Common is being carried out by three independent ringers – Tim Ball, Paul James and Karen Tucker and is supported by West Berkshire Countryside Service and the data obtained is used to supplement the Council's management plan for the Common.

Tim Ball ([tim.ball@ntlworld.com](mailto:tim.ball@ntlworld.com))

### **Copies of "Birding World" for Sale**

Several volumes of the much prized "Birding World" have been kindly donated to the Club and are available in exchange for a suitable donation to club funds.

Currently we have for sale :-

All of Volume 8, some of Volume 9, some of Volume 12, all of Volume 13, all of Volume 14, most of Volume 15, all of Volume 16, all of Volume 17 and all of Volume 18.

If you are interested please contact John Roberts (0118 9482137)

### **BTO Conference - "Putting Birds on the Map - a Birdwatcher's Forum"**

To be held at the Civic Centre, Britwell Rd., Didcot, Oxfordshire on **Saturday 23rd February 2008**. Conference Fee of £10.00, includes coffee, tea and lunch

The forum, which is open to anyone, provides an opportunity to meet other bird watchers and hear talks by six knowledgeable and well-known speakers. In this, the first year of the BTO's national bird atlas project, the theme will be mapping, atlassing and the information which we get from them. The conference commences at **9.30 a.m.** with the registration of participants, tea/coffee and an early opportunity to look round display stands, buy from commercial stalls and enter the competition. The main programme starts at **10.00 a.m.** and continues, with a short break, until an extended lunchtime, which provides another opportunity to meet people and to browse the stalls. The afternoon session includes further talks, a break for tea and the announcement of raffle and competition winners. The day will end at approximately **5.00p.m.**

#### **From the Thames to Salisbury Plain - the Wiltshire Tetrad Atlas.**

Peter Cranswick, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust

#### **The 2005 Tawny Owl Survey**

Paul Stancliffe, British Trust for Ornithology

#### **Hairstreak and Blues – local and national butterfly surveys**

Jim Asher, Butterfly Conservation

#### **The evolution of ornithological atlases**

David Gibbons, RSPB

#### **Using records to target farmland bird recovery in England**

Mike Shurmer, RSPB

#### **Bird Atlas 2007-2011**

Dawn Balmer, BTO.

Any questions to Chris Robinson (01491 671420) or to book please contact Chris Morley at BTO Thetford, telephone 01862 750050

### **Volunteering for the RSPB**

In July last year I spent 3 weeks as a volunteer at Blacktoft Sands RSPB reserve in South Yorkshire.

The RSPB run a great scheme which offers free accommodation to volunteers that can offer some time (usually a minimum of two weeks) helping out on their reserves.

I found the staffs were friendly and welcoming and even though it was a rather isolated place with not much social life (rather like a less exciting version of "Last of The Summer Wine"), it was still a great experience with some brilliant birding.

Some of the jobs I was given were quite routine, such as cleaning the hides, litter picks; but at other times I couldn't believe my ears when the warden insisted I had to watch bitterns all day! I also got involved in the wader counts at high tide and watching to see whether the marsh harriers were successfully breeding on the reserve. I also helped visitors to find elusive birds, such as bearded tits and grasshopper warblers whilst on guided walks

It was worthwhile work and I learnt a lot about how bird reserves are managed and would thoroughly recommend it to others.

Ian Loyd

## BOC Trip Report - Northumberland 7th to 10th June 2007

In view of the way the weather turned during the week after we got home, we were the luckiest people! We had a perfect trip. Some of us had been able to set out earlier in the week to make additional visits: Harry and Lin spent time in the Lake District and joined us with tales of Eagle Owls in Lancashire. Mary and I spent Wednesday exploring a part of the Peak District and casually came up with some very convincing Black Grouse and a Raven on moorland stretches. It is fair to say that we thought that a good start.

On Thursday morning we met Colin, Bill, Ted, Alan, John and Ruth at Fairburn Ings RSPB near Castleford. Tree Sparrows were at the feeders to greet us, though we were less lucky with the Willow Tits. This site consists of a collapsed coal-mine and its associated spoil heaps, which, exactly fifty years on, provide a remarkable range of dry and wetland habitats with an assortment of warblers, wildfowl and waders. Perhaps our greatest surprise was a female Goldeneye, but a whole family of Black Swans came a good second.



The final 150 miles or so took us up past the Angel of the North and on to Embleton, on the Northumberland coast, where our hotel looked out onto sand-dunes, a golf course, and Dunstanburgh Castle. It was no surprise therefore that most of us were out at 6 a.m. next morning searching through the multiple offerings of a nearby nature reserve and enjoying the visual feast of auks, Gannets and terns off-shore. On subsequent mornings we repeated the exercise below the hotel, finding Little Terns among the many birds off-shore, while the dunes and hedges below the hotel produced numbers of chats, pipits and buntings. Three Grey Partridges fed on one of the fairways, but Colin's sharp ears had located a Grasshopper Warbler. No surprise then that we were twice back in the gloaming after supper, eventually to locate a shadowy bird reeling from the top of a small bush. But all of this was incidental to the main trips.

Friday was spent on the Cheviots, in moorland terrain south-west of Wooler. We had hardly parked the cars below the heights of the curiously-named Skirl Naked when our local contact, Trevor, spotted the first Dipper in the stream. We soon found Whinchats, Stonechats and Wheatears up the valley, with Willow Warblers in the ancient alders, but the hour we spent watching the steep hillside opposite was the most magical. The calls of Ring Ouzel brought us views of at least two and maybe three birds, as each challenged its neighbours. Oystercatchers and even a pair of Goosanders flew along the valley, while Curlews fluted along the skyline above us.

In the second valley we made our bid for specialities in a heavily-wooded spot by another stream. Spotted Flycatchers obliged, but Pied were less helpful, and Redstarts likewise. But we did see a Red Squirrel move through the canopy. A pair of Curlews spent some time over the hill-top in pursuit of a very tatty Buzzard, but it was the Peregrine streaking past later that made a more impressive sight. As the afternoon wore on, birding was somewhat less fruitful, until a pair of Lesser Redpolls showed up. A Painted lady Butterfly was the first of the season for most of us. We spent an age scanning the hillside bracken for Red Grouse, but eventually decided to pursue another lead. Trevor told us of a high moorland road where we might do better. And we did! It took about ten minutes to find a family group which showed beautifully in the scopes. As we searched, Alan saw a Merlin streak low over the moor, but it was too quick for the rest of us.



Saturday was the real highlight of the trip. On arriving at Seahouses, we found Eider ducks lounging in every available corner. We booked ourselves onto the boats in a state of high anticipation. The weather had been too rough lately, but we had timed it perfectly and enjoyed a smooth run out to the first rocks. There is nothing quite like the excitement of seeing strings of Guillemots and Puffins streaking past the boat, sometimes within a few feet – unless it is the excitement of a skein of twenty or so massive Gannets doing the same thing! Kittiwakes and Fulmars also passed close by. The place was seething with birds! Soon we were by a rock and eye to eye with Cormorants, Herring Gulls, a young Grey Seal and a Great Black-backed Gull. A Shag and a Cormorant stood side by side as if to ensure that we made note of their differences before going any further.

None of that had really prepared us for the mass of birds thronging the cliffs as we approached the outer island of Staple. The gentle swell of noise was the second thing to register as we ran into the landing. Then, as we climbed the steps into the throng of birds, we experienced the pervading fishy scent of the thousands of sea-birds that occupied the rocks and burrows of this tiny island.

Suffice it to say that the next two hours were extraordinary, as we watched birds attend eggs and chicks. Guillemots hurtled in on the wing, stalled, plummeted into the throng, and then waddled absent-mindedly to find their partners. Razorbills quietly showed them how to behave more sensibly. Shags shuffled around stealing bits of nesting material to add to their flat structures. Kittiwakes returned, shouting their name as their changed places on the high dome of weed. Fulmars sat tight in soft corners. Inevitably, it was the Puffins that entertained most. Hurtling in like large mechanical beetles, and carrying precious cargoes of sand-eels, they dropped next to their burrows and were underground in a trice. A bird would then reappear, look around, find a bit of height on a rock, wind up its wings, and then hurtle off again on the next mission. Funny to watch, but not so funny if you are that tiny bird trying to dodge the lurking Herring gulls and Lesser Black-backed Gulls! Amazingly we also saw one tiny Rock Pipit gathering insects for her young near all of this chaos and danger, and even a butterfly or two. All too soon we were on the boat again for the run to Inner Farne, via rocks where a close encounter with the story of Grace Darling gave us an even closer encounter with some massive adult Grey Seals. Through a turbulent gap for a short way, we then made the smoother run to a landing under St Cuthbert's Chapel.

This was the bit that we remembered so well from Bill Oddie and David Attenborough – or from Alfred Hitchcock's "The Birds" to be more honest! As we climbed the path, Arctic Terns swooped and screamed in indignation as they protected territories built within inches of the boardwalk. It was a curiously paradoxical privilege to have one perched on my hat and trying to drill through to my scalp with its blood-red, sharp little bill. As for the guano assault, it took three goes to sponge that out of my jacket later! The beautiful little blighters were everywhere for the first stretch, but they had no manners and it was a relief to get beyond them to watch the large cluster of beautifully-behaved Sandwich Terns. Then came the gentle Eider Ducks curled up in the weeds or on the rocks, then many more of the now-familiar auks, Shags and Kittiwakes. And there was even an Oystercatcher in a rocky hollow near the lighthouse.



With a bit of time to spare for some more challenging birding, some of us spent the last half-hour searching through the flock of terns on the beach rocks near the landing stage. Most of these were non-breeding birds, some with clear signs of immature plumage. They included Arctic, Common and Sandwich Terns, but we were hunting for some Roseates that had been seen the day before. No luck though, and a Ringed Plover was not much compensation.

The return journey was still an active one, though not for a bunch of birded-out passengers. Ted and I were the two lucky ones who spotted the one Manx Shearwater of the day. And those impressive Gannets just kept on streaming past on their way back to the Bass Rock (real specimens of *Sula bassana*, these!), which was some 50 miles to the north.

One final pre-breakfast session on Sunday, and then we were on the road south, but with an important break of a couple of hours at Blacktoft Sands, near Goole, some 160 miles down. The fifteen mile detour proved to be well-worth the trouble, with the pools, reed-beds and bushes producing, among other things, Avocet, Bittern, Black-tailed Godwit, Bearded Tit, Marsh Harrier, Barn Owl, Tree Sparrows, and even two Garganey drakes.

Making our way home from there independently, Mary and I switched on our own kettle soon after 7 p.m. We had over 900 miles on the trip meter, an immense increase in the year list, and several hundred photos to process later. We both agreed that this had been one of the best birding trips ever. Our heartiest thanks for that go to Colin for his superb planning and to the others for their good company.

Ray Reedman

### **Sad to Report**

And finally, December brought us the sad news of the death of two of our longest serving and popular members of the Club, **Derick Foskett** and **Cyril Bulmer**.

Derick Foskett served on the committee for two spells in the 1980s while Cyril Bulmer similarly lent his support in the mid 1990s. Both will be sorely missed.

Our thoughts and sympathies go to their families and friends.