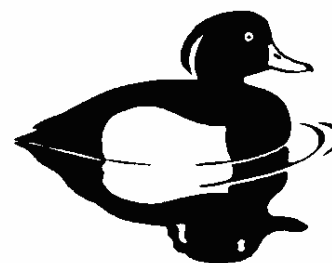


# BOC Newsletter

Spring 2008

No 41



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## Introduction

With spring showing some signs of arrival (in between severe bouts of winter) thoughts must be turning to getting out and doing some birdwatching, hopefully in pleasant, warm weather. If your birding needs a little more focus, there are a number of surveys that you can get involved in, like the BBI and BTO Atlas. And there is always the BOC Garden Bird Survey, the forms for which are included with this newsletter (with apologies for the delay in sending out the paper copies). Please note that there is a small change on the GBS forms this time, in that you are asked to record maximum bird numbers against each recorded species, bringing them closer to way that the BTO garden bird survey works.

Also please don't forget that we still have one indoor meeting left in our programme, along with many outdoor trips and excursions throughout the next few months. Please see later item for more information.

As always, all contributions to the newsletter are much appreciated – please get contributions for the Summer edition of the newsletter to me by Friday 27<sup>th</sup> June.

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Many thanks go to all contributors to this newsletter, including Gordon Langsbury for his photos of the account of the North Spitzbergen trip. Other illustrations courtesy of Kingfisher Publications plc.

## Membership List

I am grateful to all those members who renew their membership promptly in the autumn, (the vast majority of you) and to those late ones who renew cheerfully when reminded in January or February. However some people do not respond until prompted a third time, if at all!

So this message is to all those who have still not renewed for the 2007- 2008 year - if you do not respond this time you will be taken off the list (only eleven of you, but we do not wish to deprive anyone of the benefits of belonging to such a lively club!)

I will take the opportunity also of saying that if any member moves house it essential that I am informed of the new address (you'd be surprised to know that some people forget to do so and then complain that they are not receiving mailings !) Finally if anyone decides they can no longer be a member a quick phone call, written note or e-mail helps me to keep the list accurate and saves the club the trouble and expense of sending out unwanted mailings, to say nothing of reminders.

Dot Lincoln (Membership Secretary)

## **Kennet Valley Park – Please Write to Your MP**

You will probably be aware of the threat to the Theale and Burghfield areas posed by the Kennet Valley Park development (see [www.kennetvalleypark.com](http://www.kennetvalleypark.com) for the Prudential's plans). In 2006 Prudential withdrew their proposals and turned their attention to the 'Examination in Public' (EiP) by HM Planning Inspectors which was trying to decide where the extra housing in South East England should be located. The Pru's representatives advised the EiP of the merits of their proposals for 7500 houses south of Reading, but the objections of the Government agencies such as the Department of Transport and importantly, the Environment Agency who oppose the proposals on floodplain and environmental grounds, were not mentioned in the Inspectors report. This report is now under consideration by the Government and could be accepted and then opened for public consultation later this year. We are advised that it is far better to have the reference to Kennet Valley Park removed from the report as it has been added without proper consultation and will provide the developers with an advantage in future when applying for planning permission.

Martin Salter MP for Reading West has been working hard to try and have the reference to Kennet Valley Park removed before the Government publishes its plans. We need to make sure all other local MPs add their support to this argument which has at its root the objection to building, against Environment Agency advice, on the functional floodplain. We need members to write to their MPs urgently to create the most noise possible at this time. You can send emails or write letters, but please do something to help.

Please write to your local MP, including the following :-

**John Redwood** (MP for Wokingham) – email to [redwoodj@parliament.uk](mailto:redwoodj@parliament.uk)

or write to John Redwood MP, House of Commons, Westminster, SW1A 0AA

**Rob Wilson** (MP for Reading East) – fill in comments form at

<http://www.robwilsonmp.org.uk/record.jsp?type=requiredPage&ID=58&contact=contact>

or write to - Office of Rob Wilson MP, House of Commons, Westminster, London, SW1A 0AA

**Richard Benyon** (MP for West Berkshire) - email to [mp@richardbenyon.com](mailto:mp@richardbenyon.com)

or write to Richard Benyon MP, House of Commons, Westminster, SW1A 0AA

Many thanks

Colin Wilson

## **Photographic Competition 2008**

We were delighted with the entry for this years competition with almost 150 photographs entered, divided into the three categories of digiscoping, action and portrait. The judges, President Gordon Langsbury and Dave Cromack, Editor of Birds Illustrated provided erudite and helpful comment to the enthusiastic audience and the photographers as they judged each of the entries.

The superb winner of the action section and the Gordon Langsbury Cup, Bill Watts picture of a Grey Heron landing, again illustrates that the exotic birds are not the only ones to photograph. Indeed Bill's picture of a Blue Tit inspecting a cobweb is another example of this clinching second spot in the same category. More exotic perhaps is the exceptional winning portrait of the Black Guillemot by last years winner Mike McKee and bringing us back to our local habitats was David Donn's winning digiscoped Water Rail.

Our thanks go to London Camera Exchange for providing a contribution to the prizes and for the discount vouchers and optical equipment information provided to members. We also thank our judges and Dave Cromack in particular for providing a choice of new books for section winners and a subscription to Birds Illustrated for the winner of the Gordon Langsbury Cup.

As we look forward to next years competition we need to dust down those lenses and get snapping again so we can look forward to another enthralling evening.

Editor's Note: Unfortunately none of the pictures can be reproduced here – it would not be possible to do the pictures justice in this form, although they can be seen on the Club Web site at [www.berksoc.org.uk](http://www.berksoc.org.uk)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Final Indoor Meeting

The Warbler Identification evening will take place on **Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> April** at Dinton Pastures. This event is aimed at those who want to revise or improve their recognition of basic British warblers with tips on visual aspects and song I.D. at the start of the new season. It will be a very informal evening with time for discussion etc.

**Please note that this will take place in the Study Centre at Dinton Pastures starting at 7.30pm.**

### Field Trips and Excursions

This is our busiest time of the year for outdoor trips and excursions – offering many excellent opportunities to get out in the field at some local and slightly more distant locations and enjoy the company of fellow club members. In all cases further details can be found in the Programme Card, on the Web site or via the named contact for each outing.

**Please note that, for the coach trip to Dungeness (April 27<sup>th</sup>) and the Poole Harbour boat trip (June 14<sup>th</sup>), early booking is required – please contact Ray Reedman as soon as possible if you are interested.**

### April

**Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> April 2008 - Pirbright Common (Evening only)**

Contact: Colin Wilson (01252 837411)

**Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> April 2008 (Mid-week walk) - Pamber Forest and Silchester Common**

Contact: Ray Reedman (0118 9864338)

**Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2008 - Dungeness, Kent (Full day by Coach)**

Contact: Ray Reedman (0118 9864338)

### May

**Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2008 (Mid-week walk) - Bird Song Walk at Dinton Pasture.**

Contact: Ray Reedman (0118 986 4338)

**Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> May 2008 - Minsmere RSPB (Full day coach outing with East Berks RSPB)**

Contact Ernie Allen (East Berks RSPB organiser) on 01628 625324.

**Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2008 - New Forest and Pennington Marshes (Full day or morning only)**

Contact: Martin Sell (0118 9471170)

**Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2008 (Mid-week walk). - Bramshill Plantation.**

Contact: Ray Reedman (0118 9864338)

### June

**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2008 - Lakenheath RSPB Reserve, Suffolk (Full day)**

Contact: Bill Nicoll (01344 455403)

**Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2008 - Poole Harbour, Dorset (Evening boat trip)**

Contact: Ray Reedman (0118 9864338) asap for details and booking

**Thursday June 19<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Mid-week walk). - Woolhampton Area.**

Contact: Martin Sell (0118 947 1170)

### Leslie Osborne - Obituary

Some members will remember Leslie, who was a member of the BOC (ROC), before leaving the area. Below is an obituary that was written by Robin Crane and published in the Sussex Ornithological Society (SOS) Newsletter, earlier this year.

“Leslie Osborne retired to Midhurst in 1981 after a distinguished career in the government’s agricultural advisory service. He was Britain’s agricultural attaché in Washington for three years and his final appointment was as the Ministry of Agriculture’s advisory director for SouthEast England. He died in November 2007.

Like everything else in his life, Leslie approached bird studies meticulously and efficiently. For about 20 years he recorded birds for the SOS in the Midhurst area and almost every day he was out observing and making notes. He participated in many surveys and the integrity of his records was never in doubt. Leslie specialised in studying the Wood Lark. Whilst the Wood Lark is remarkably tame and the ground, its behaviour and breeding habits are extraordinarily difficult to analyse. He was working on this species for 15 years before writing a most interesting paper for the Sussex Bird Report in 1996 that included identification of its wintering areas close to its breeding locations in West Sussex and the behaviour of the Wood Lark in their winter flocks. This was followed by another paper in 1997 in which he described the movements of young broods - observations apparently absent from the literature.

Leslie was a warm, articulate and highly intelligent man of the old school who enjoyed a remarkably successful and active life for over 91 years. He gave great pleasure to many people and his study of birds in Sussex will be a lasting memorial to him.”

## Brief Summary of Bird Sightings between October 2006 and October 2007 (not yet been verified by BRC)



Starting with the big wet ones, at a big wet place called QMR.

A Red-throated Diver appeared from 24th to 26th December. A Great Northern Diver (juvenile) was there from 1st December into 2007 and was joined by a second bird from 8th. (Another Great Northern Diver was at Theale GP on 6th December and yet another was found there on 31 March). A Leach's Storm-petrel (a rare sighting for the county) occurred on 7th December. Just before you get bored with QMR, it also yielded an Arctic Skua on 27th May, a Long-tailed Skua, on 21st August, a Glaucous Gull on Boxing Day and an Iceland Gull on 1 April. And on the wader front a Purple Sandpiper also appeared on Boxing day

Just to prove water birds turn up elsewhere a Red-necked Grebe appeared in January at Lower Farm and Ferruginous Duck and Ring-necked Duck appeared at Dorney Wetlands in April

Even better birds appeared - a Cattle Egret was at Lea Farm GP on 21st May (flying north) and further sightings of this species at Lower Farm in October caused great excitement as many rushed to add the bird to their county lists after it was sighted by a local RSPB field trip and was there all day. Spoonbills, an increasingly common sighting in the country, as well as the county, were sighted through May with records from Bracknell, Dorney Wetlands and Lea Farm.

An Avocet was found at Woolhampton GP on March 22nd followed by one at Moor Green Lakes LNR on 20th April. Other wader records for this site included Ruff, Dunlin, a few Golden Plover, Ringed Plover, breeding RPs, Oystercatcher, Greenshanks, Whimbrel, Sanderling, Turnstones and a Knot.

At Moor Green Lakes, Goosanders appeared on 3 November and they stayed until singles finally left in mid April. Ruddy Ducks were present early in the year, maybe fleeing from culling elsewhere in the country! Barn Owls were seen from time to time around the nest boxes, bred successfully and often showed in the box entrances during the summer. Last winter many saw the Peregrine Falcon that had been in the area for a few months and took up residence on one of the pylons near Horseshoe Lake. Sadly, the Common Terns failed to raise any young this year.

At other locations, there were two Honey Buzzards (dark phase birds) over the A4 between Reading and Maidenhead on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

A pair of Bearded Tits were seen feeding on reedmace at Horton GP on 7<sup>th</sup> November and a Twite circled over Slough SF, landed briefly, and then flew off north east on November 18<sup>th</sup>. It was later relocated on waste ground at Cippenham, but only in flight and was not heard to call.

Just in case you thought that these records were in any sort of order, I can tell you that a Glossy Ibis was at Winnersh on 6<sup>th</sup> May and a Bean Goose at Remenham from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> January.

Maybe the best bird of the year, an Ortolan Bunting, was seen by very few birders. Located at Wraybury on 5<sup>th</sup> September, it is the first record since one was at Sunninghill in 1958.



According to Marek's brilliant web site ([www.berksbirds.com](http://www.berksbirds.com)), some 202 species have been recorded during this period.

Thanks, as always, go to all those people who put in records – it all helps to make our database all the stronger for assisting with planning applications, allocation of government funding and other purposes, including the Atlas.

## North Spitzbergen - 29th June to 6th July 2007

“Today we head for the pack ice and we will go to the North Pole if necessary”. It was our fourth day on the ex-research vessel Professor Multanovskiy when this announcement was made and all 54 passengers, who included Joy and Gordon Langsbury, and Lois and myself, looked forward to our meeting with the ice. We had already seen icebergs which had broken from glaciers, but now we would encounter the sea ice of the polar region.



We had joined the ship at Longyearbyen and it soon became apparent that the ship, crew, guides, food and fellow passengers met our every expectation. Our first notable wildlife encounter was at Camp Mansfield, a derelict mining camp which had been active in the period 1911-1920. How active is debatable as the promised “Island of Marble” produced only one shipment to the UK, where it crumbled to dust because of its imperfections. Today the camp has wonderful steam engine relics and a pair of long tailed skuas, both of which seemed anxious to be photographed. Nearby were ptarmigans, red throated divers, snow buntings and pink footed geese.

Later in the day we visited Ny Alesund, the northernmost settlement in the world. The settlement must be grim in any weather, but we had rain and snow to greet us. Most visitors post their cards at this location and all birdwatchers look for ivory gulls. We found them, and barnacle geese with their young, on the edge of the settlement.

The next day was still cloudy, but bright colour was brought to the day by grey phalaropes in their red breeding plumage. We were within yards of them in our landing boats and on shore. There were probably a dozen individuals, all keen to do their twirls and to be photographed. On the shore the group divided and, as is often the case, the non-birdwatchers found the king eider. However the birdwatching group had their turn later in the trip when they found some very rare vagrants, a Stella’s eider and golden plover.

Now into the pack ice which, unfortunately, had in this instance been thoroughly packed by a steady wind. Initially we followed the edge of the ice looking for a weakness to allow our entry, and eventually the captain turned into the ice and headed north. We had hoped to see polar bears on the ice floes – with cubs as a bonus – but none were seen. Instead, we enjoyed the pack ice cracking and moving as the ship progressed. Fulmars and kittiwakes were still flying north as we turned to leave the ice. The outside temperature was 4°C and we were 632.8 miles from the pole.



“No polar bears yet” was heard in many conversations (distant views of one being discounted), but July 3<sup>rd</sup> brought sunshine and an excellent encounter. The zodiacs were cruising the shoreline, when there was our bear. With a steep cliff behind it the bear could only move along the water’s edge and we were able to follow it over rocks and snow. It was estimated that 4,000 photographs were taken! Thereafter, in beautiful sunshine, we cruised the front of the glacier and more photographs were taken of kittiwakes, Brunnich’s and black guillemots resting on blue ice which had just broken from the glacier.



Later in the day a visit to an old whaling station reminded us of the slaughter of whales. It was estimated that 60,000 whales were processed at this station. Local whale population is now estimated at 60-100, so we were very lucky to later see one of the hump-backed whales show itself in calm water.

Our day was not over. After dinner it was onshore again and steep climb to the little auk colony. We were surrounded by them, the sun was shining, the sky was blue and it was 11pm.

What was left for our last two days? Firstly, 40 or so walrus which we approached very slowly. What fascinating animals, and so big. Again these creatures are recovering from the slaughter of the last century. Secondly, quiet walks on isolated beaches where most photographers were found lying flat on beach, scree or tundra to photograph the wonderful flora. Many of the beaches are covered with hundreds of trimmed logs, and this on an island of no trees. Apparently these came from the logging areas of Siberia where they fall into the sea, freeze into the pack ice and move across the pole to emerge in Norwegian waters about 100 years later.

This was an interesting trip, full of local history and wildlife which, although small in numbers of species, was on occasions, quite spectacular. The birdwatching group from Wildwings recorded 32 bird species, an unusually high number.

It should also be recorded that three South Africans, an American and an Irishman decided to swim in the Arctic Ocean. One of your members was not willing to let these “colonials” scoff at the British nation so, for Queen, country and the BOC, it was clothes off (and a lot of them) down to underpants and into the water – it was a mistake!!

John Roberts

## Berkshire's Nearest Choughs



Where does the Berks birder find his or her nearest breeding Choughs; Pembrokeshire? Cornwall? The answer for the past fifteen or so years is the Gower peninsula just beyond Swansea in South Wales. I have holidayed in this area for a number of years and having read in 'An Atlas of Breeding Birds in West Glamorgan' that Choughs had ceased to breed in the area by the end of the 19th Century, was very surprised to hear from some local birders on a guided walk last year that this nationally scarce crow had returned to the Gower to breed.

The birders told me that Choughs could be found in two main areas on the Gower and that one site in particular was reliable for sightings at most times of year, the birds being resident. This site is at Pennard on the rocky south coast and is best approached by taking the A4118 west out of Swansea following signs for 'The Gower', and later 'Port Eynon'. After having crossed a fairly wild open area with cattle grids look for a left turn to Pennard and Kittle (B4436). After half a mile take a right turn at the 'T' junction towards Pennard although the village you then enter is called Southgate. Continue straight on until a mini roundabout is reached with a large grassed car park to the right which is owned by the National Trust. At busy times there is a small charge for parking but there is nowhere else. The surrounding area of grass and heather topped cliffs is all potential Chough territory but in my last two visits I have found it best to follow the coast paths east (leftward when facing out to sea) to the Bacon Hole and Hunts Bay area where there are signs warning visitors not to disturb the birds from 1st March to 1st August at their cliff nesting sites.

In August 2006 I obtained fantastic close views of a pair probing the turf on a ledge below me at Pwlldu Head and this August (2007) found a group of six doing their tumbling aerobatics and distinctive harsh calls in the same area. Other birds of interest include Stonechats, Ravens and Rock Pipits.

If you're in the area for business or pleasure at any time of year give this site a try. These birds, incidentally, are the result of natural recolonisation by the Pembrokeshire population which has been confirmed by DNA samples.

Happy Choughing!

Mark Whitaker

## And Finally – Did you hear the one about the Gull that walked into the newsagents shop?

Just in case you missed this story from last year, apparently this herring gull became a regular 'customer' of a newsagent's shop in Aberdeen. He would wait until there was no one about before nipping in to take a packet of cheese flavoured snacks (always the same type and flavour), before, with help from other birds, ripping open the packet and devouring the contents. Apparently the locals rather took to him and even paid for the stolen packets!

