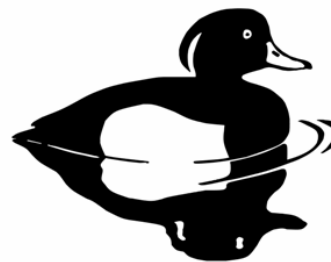


BOC Newsletter

Spring 2010

No 49



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Introduction

Welcome to the spring edition of the Club Newsletter, hopefully coinciding with some proper spring weather (surely I can’t have just seen a weather forecast predicting snow!). After such a long, cold, wet winter it will be nice to get ‘out and about’ to enjoy the arrival of our early spring migrants, with wheatears, hirundines and warblers now being widely reported.

For those who receive their newsletter by post, I have included a copy of the Club’s Summer Garden Bird Survey form – an electronic version being sent to all of you for whom we have email addresses. You will notice that there is now an extra column for “Breeding Code”, which will allow you to provide data for the BTO National Bird Atlas and our own county avifauna. Many members are already involved in this survey work and will know that one of the most difficult areas is the gathering of firm breeding evidence, even of ‘common or garden’ birds. Even if you are not an official surveyor, you can help by recording any evidence you see in your gardens on the GBS form, particularly that which confirms breeding success e.g. adult birds taking food to nests, newly fledged young etc. The form provides a list of codes to be used, so do please try to help.

Our indoor programme is nearing the end for this season, but we still have a number of field trips over the next few months, including mid-week walks and visits to Farlington Marshes, Christchurch Harbour, the New Forest and a weekend trip to Yorkshire. Not to mention our annual coach trip to the ever popular Birdfair at Rutland. Your Membership Card contains all the details - I hope you will be able to join our stalwart leaders on some of these outings.

As always, all contributions to the newsletter are much appreciated – please get contributions for the Summer edition of the newsletter to me by Friday 25th June.

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

Upcoming Indoor meeting: 14th April 2010

The last indoor meeting of the season will be an Identification workshop, entitled *Who’s for a lark or a chat?* Taking place in the Dinton Pastures main centre, starting at 8 p.m, Ray Reedman will be taking us through the identification of the more common larks, pipits, wagtails and chats. Please come along and enjoy what should be an interesting and informative session.

British Birdwatching Fair, Rutland – Excursion 21st August 2010

The Birdfair is the biggest event of its kind in Britain. It is a fascinating day out, giving you the chance to investigate all sorts of bird-related matters, to attend talks or to do a bit of special bird watching. Look for a book bargain; test all the best optics; tour the art and photography; attend a ringing demonstration; investigate a holiday; tick off an Osprey, a Tree Sparrow, a Packham or an Oddie. It's all there!

BOC sponsors the coach, but shares this day out with other local bird and wildlife groups, so you can join at Newbury (the Wharf) at 6:30 a.m.; Reading (Whiteknights Park) at 7.00 a.m.; or Bray (Hibbert Rd) at 7.20 a.m.

Your ticket will cost £27 and that includes entry to the event. **(Please reserve a place as soon as possible.)** If you have never tried it, give it a go this year! To book, contact **Ray Reedman on 0118 9864338** or **Bill Nicoll on 01344 455403**

BOC Field Trip to Farlington Marsh – Sunday 11th April 2010

Due to the original leader 'deserting his post' (some excuse about being in Cyprus!), Robert Godden will be leading this trip. Please contact him if you would like to attend. His details are as follows:-

Home telephone - :01252 872503. Mobile - 07543 800921, Email - robert.godden@virgin.net

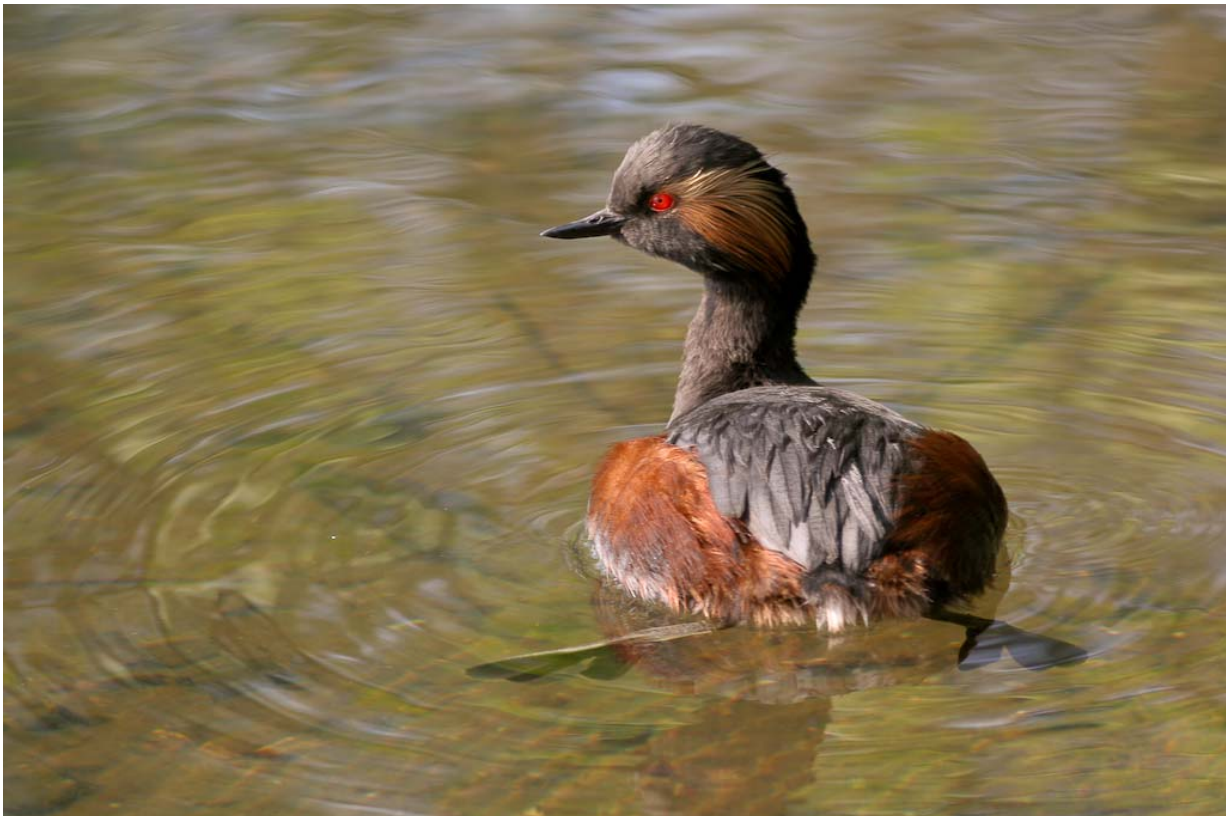
BOC Photographic Competition 2010 – yet another New Winner!

For the first time, Marek Walford won the Gordon Langsbury Cup at the BOC Photographic Competition for his superb portrait of a Black-necked Grebe. This is a continuation of the remarkable run of new winners every year since at least 2003. A collection of superb photographs was entered by Colin and Patricia Humphrey between them winning three of the four top prizes in the two contested categories. However, a total of five portraits were marked at maximum by the judges Gordon Langsbury and David Cromack ensuring stiff competition in the final selection for the Portrait section. In Action, a remarkable nine entries attracted maximum marks making the final selection of the winner even harder. A total of seventy five entries were contested in the Portrait section and forty two in the Action category. Due to lack of entries the digiscoping category was not contested. This was again a very high quality and competitive evening and David Cromack is investigating further publication opportunities for the winners.

The competition was sponsored by London Camera Exchange to whom the Club offer their gratitude.

Colin Wilson

Editor's Note: Marek's winning picture is reproduced below, but, due to the limitations of the printing etc, hardly doing justice to this cracking picture (sorry Marek!)



Berkshire's Breeding Birds: Changes over the last Twenty Years

The first two years of atlas surveying are indicating distribution changes from twenty years ago, some of which reflect known national trends, others perhaps not anticipated. The tentative conclusions here are based on records that have not yet been validated and on two years' only – things may change with two more seasons' data! More records are needed, especially **confirmation of breeding**, to strengthen the data and underpin future conservation work.

The indications are that Berkshire may have lost **Wood Warbler**, **Tree Sparrow** and **Hawfinch** as breeding species and **Willow Tit** and **Snipe** are almost gone. Breeding evidence for any of these species would be welcomed. On the other hand, **Little Egret**, **Red Kite**, **Herring** and **Lesser Black-backed Gulls**, **Peregrine** and **Dartford Warbler** have started breeding in Berkshire since 1989.

Lost to Berkshire?



Newcomers to the county



A number of farmland species have declined in their distribution, disappearing from much of the lower land: **Grey Partridge**, **Turtle Dove**, **Corn Bunting**, **Yellow Wagtail** and to a lesser extent, **Yellowhammer** (disappearing in the east) and **Reed Bunting**. There is some indication that **Reed Bunting** and **Yellow Wagtail** are becoming more abundant on the Downs, but more breeding data are needed to confirm this.

The national declines in several woodland species are reflected in the Berkshire data: **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Marsh Tit** (disappearing in the east of the County).

Other species which may be declining that we are keen for more breeding information on are: **Teal**, **Redshank**, **House Martin**, **Tree Pipit** (have they really disappeared from SU57?), **Nightingale**, **Grasshopper Warbler**, **Garden Warbler**, **Lesser Whitethroat**, **Lesser Redpoll**. **Willow Warbler** is nationally declining in the south of its range - there are widespread records of singing birds in Berkshire, making it a common "possible" breeder, but stronger evidence of breeding in few tetrads: can we firm up on breeding evidence for this species?

On the positive side, in addition to the new breeders listed above, there appear to be as many species whose ranges are expanding in Berkshire as there are declining species: **Egyptian Goose**, **Shelduck**, **Gadwall**, **Mandarin**, **Cormorant**, **Buzzard**, **Hobby**, **Stone Curlew**, **Curlew**, **Black-headed Gull**, **Common Tern**, **Ring-necked Parakeet**, **Woodlark**, **Stonechat**, **Cetti's Warbler**, **Firecrest**.

The provisional distribution maps are at <http://www.berksoc.org.uk/atlas/maps/atlas.html>. Please help us build a full and accurate atlas by submitting your evidence of breeding for any species, but especially those listed here, via the BTO's Atlas or Birdtrack pages.

Renton Righelato, Birds of Berkshire Atlas Group, March 2010

BOC Trip Reports:

Excursion to Pagham Harbour – November 15th 2009

Optimism is a much undervalued quality and one that birdwatchers are well advised to cultivate. A good lesson could have been learned by anyone who turned up for excursion to Pagham Harbour last November. The weather before the day had been very wet and miserable and I suspect some people were put off, but, as luck would have it, the day itself turned out to be truly delightful, with a fair amount of warm sunshine providing very pleasant conditions for our visit.

We started off at the visitor's centre and walked down to view the famous Ferry Pool, which, it seems to me, to have been somewhat of a disappointment of late. Admittedly we did arrive at the top of the tide, but the water levels in the pool meant very few waders were present (mainly Lapwings and Redshanks, with a fleeting visit by Black Tailed Godwits), and the most obvious birds were ducks, with Teal, Shovelers and Shelduck very much in evidence. The Buzzard sitting on the fencepost at the back of the pool further illustrated just how well this bird has now repopulated most parts of the country, following its past persecutions.

A walk down to the harbour illustrated just how high the tide was, but the few grassy islands merited investigation and we were rewarded with a variety of waders, including Avocet, Curlew, Godwits, Grey Plover and Snipe (although a suspected Jack Snipe could not be adequately identified).

A return to the cars allowed us to move round to Church Norton, where a brief lunch break was taken (with fresh tea courtesy of John Roberts' mobile kitchen facility – much appreciated) before a gentle ramble down to the harbour side. A few more waders and the ever present Little Egrets showed well, before we turned our attention to the sea in search of the promised Slavonian Grebes which regularly winter there. A search among the many Great Crested Grebes failed to turn up the 'Slav', but a diver fairly close in got our attention. As usual it spent much time either underwater or invisible in the swell, but agreement was finally reached that it was a fine Great Northern Diver, always a nice bird to find wherever you are. A closer inspection of the many gulls on the beach identified, at first, a single Mediterranean Gull, but as the birds flew across in front of us, several more were seen, allowing us to check out the features that allow this lovely pale-winged gull to be identified with some certainty.

With the daylight starting to dim we returned to the cars for our journey home, a thoroughly enjoyable day having been had. When you go birdwatching, it pays to be an optimist!



Ted Rogers

Bird Ringing Demonstration at Padworth Common – November 2009

Delayed by a week due to bad weather the Bird Ringing Demo still proved a success, as evidenced by this note from Tim Ball, who lead on this activity. Many thanks, Tim!

“Given the dodgy weather forecast and the last minute rearrangement the previous weekend I think we had a pretty successful morning. The weather was certainly a damper as we had to close the nets for half an hour or so during a shower. We had something like 12-15 visitors most of who stayed for most of the time we were demonstrating and seemed to enjoy it and find it interesting. Overall we caught 49 birds of 8 species:

| | Ring | Retrap |
|--------------------------|------|--------|
| Great Spotted Woodpecker | 1 | 1 |
| Duncock | 1 | |
| Robin | 3 | |
| Marsh Tit | 1 | |
| Coal Tit | 8 | 4 |
| Blue Tit | 8 | 5 |
| Great Tit | 7 | 7 |
| Chaffinch | 2 | 1 |
| Totals | 31 | 18 |

The Marsh Tit attracted quite a bit of attention given recent discussions about distinguishing them from Willow Tits, it showed all the classic in-hand features and even had visible unmoulted greater coverts allowing it to be easily aged as a juvenile.

The retraps including some quite interesting birds:

- A Great Tit which had been ringed at Padworth in 2006 and but hasn't been retrapped in-between times
- A juvenile Blue Tit ringed in July 4 km away by one of our team in their garden in Burghfield Common
- A juvenile Blue Tit ringed September 3 km away at Aldermaston Gravel Pits by Newbury Ringing Group
- Two Great Tits ringed as chicks at Padworth as part of our ongoing nest box study

The Blue Tits illustrate the late summer/autumn local dispersal of Blue and Great Tit juveniles.”

Book Reviews

Birds, bees, trees and much more...

With a cute-snouted hedgehog on the cover, it's not very hard to see the way the RSPB powers-that-be are thinking, judging by their latest pocket-sized book *Wildlife of Britain* (Dorling Kindersley, £14.99): they want us to see birds as part of nature in the round. This chunky 600-pager devotes only 84 of them to birds; the rest are taken up by trees, wild flowers, fungi, reptiles, amphibians, fish, butterflies and insects.

It's a really useful quick reference book for novice naturalists like me whose interest in birds naturally overflows into curiosity about the wildlife and plants with which they co-exist. If I'm allowed a minor quibble, it would be that the format is a bit too small for positive tree identification although you'd need quite a big pocket to carry this book – the size of a small brick - around in.

Worth its weight in words and pictures

Not so much a handy aid to birdwatching in the field as a huge tome with which to anchor down your coffee table. That was my initial reaction to *Where To Go Wild In Britain* (published by Dorling Kindersley Ltd) which promotes itself as ‘‘a month-by-month guide to the UK’s best wildlife experiences’’. It weighs a ton and, at £25, some might say it has a price to match.

But after dipping inside its glossy covers, I was soon engrossed as memories of such favourite places as Minsmere and Skomer were brought back to life on the page in words and spectacular photographs. Indeed, if you’re one of those sad individuals already counting down the number of shopping days to Christmas, you might well consider this an ideal gift for someone who’s a nature enthusiast.

Turning at random to Page 95, for instance, kingfishers on the Llangollen Canal in April are featured but you’re also told what other wildlife can be seen there in summer, autumn and winter while helpful cross-references are made to sites where similar species can be found, in this case the Basingstoke Canal and Lee Valley.

In the conclusion to his introductory blurb, Mike Dilger says: ‘‘All you need to do now is pack your camera, your binoculars, and this book, put on your walking boots and get out there and enjoy!’’ Fair enough, but you wouldn’t get very far if you attempted to stuff this heavyweight fount of knowledge in your rucksack. Best to savour its delights on the sofa at home - and then make your trip.

Steve Thomson

Condemn or Support?

Twice recently I have heard speakers at two different bird clubs speak dismissively of even considering bird watching in Italy ‘‘because they shoot birds there’’. Well of course it is still true, although much less than formerly. Interestingly enough, both speakers were not averse to bird watching in France although, if anything, currently France has a worse record than Italy. Both countries have an organisation like our RSPB, although much smaller in membership, working to help protect habitat and species, to educate the public, to work with schoolchildren and young people generally, to buy up land and get places reserve status, to lobby their government in order to get another point of view across to counter the hunting lobby, and to encourage conservation and eco-tourism. Surely we, so privileged with our own powerful RSPB and splendidly flourishing BOC, ought to be encouraging the efforts of these minority organisations and not deriding them.

I have travelled for bird watching in both Italy and France in the last couple of years and as an eco-tourist have joined their organisations. The local volunteer workers and members are delighted to meet British bird watchers and are very envious of us. The Italian organisation is called LIPU (Lega Italiana Proteziane Uccelli – the Italian League for the Protection of Birds) and the French one is called LPO - Ligue Pour la Protection des Oiseaux (same meaning). Both organisations have had support and guidance from the RSPB. LIPU has a branch in England that raises money for Italian conservation and publishes reports in a magazine in English, (and also one in Italian, available on request but I find the Italian quite difficult). LPO publishes a big quarterly magazine, with fascinating articles in French, not too difficult to read with the occasional use of a dictionary and a bit of guesswork.

So, why not try supporting our European friends in their efforts instead of dismissing or condemning them? You may not want to join either LIPU or LPO although I can give you details if you do.

Dot Lincoln

Treasurer's Note

In the last Newsletter I told you of subscription increases, and I offer a reminder

| | |
|----------------|-----|
| Single | £20 |
| Family | £25 |
| Single Retired | £15 |
| Family Retired | £19 |
| Country | £15 |
| Student | £10 |

The retired rates are a 25% reduction of the full rates and are available to those pensioners who wish to opt for that lower rate.

If you pay by Banker's Order, and one is printed for your use below, you can reduce your payment by £2. Please send your Order to your Bank etc. as soon as possible to ensure correct payment in October. Dot Lincoln and I are already worried about 12 different subscription rates, so ease our busy period by ensuring it is not you who pays at the old rate.

Better news is that I have reclaimed £1095 under the Gift Aid scheme, £965 for the Club and £130 for the Atlas Group. You can always check with me on 0118 9482137 if you want to know if you have signed a Gift Aid form .

John Roberts

And Finally

Member John Hard reports that an email from a friend, sent during a recent Garden Bird Survey, was blocked by his Internet Service Provider (ISP) because it contained "salacious content".

Apparently it contained a reference to Long Tailed Tits !!

Editor's Note: Perhaps I should have put this item on Page 3?

Banker's Order Form

| | |
|--|-------------|
| To: The Manager (<i>Name & address of your Bank</i>) | |
| | |
| Postcode: | |
| Sort Code: | Account No. |
| Account Name: | |

| | |
|--|-------|
| Please pay (<i>amount in words</i>) | £ |
| the first payment to made on (<i>date</i>) _____ and thereafter on 1st October annually until further notice to the account of BERKSHIRE ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB, Account no. 09138608, at Alliance & Leicester plc (72-00-05), Bootle, Merseyside, GIR 0AA. | |
| Please cancel immediately any previous standing order from my account in favour of the Berkshire Ornithological Club. | |
| Signed: | Date: |