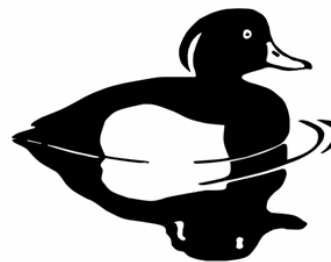


BOC Newsletter

Summer/Autumn 2010

No 50



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Introduction

Welcome to the 50th edition of this newsletter – unbelievable isn't it? Time really does fly when you are enjoying yourself! This one is effectively a combined summer and autumn edition, as I failed to get the summer edition ready in time. I will try harder in future (honestly) and will look to produce the quarterly editions earlier, so that they will fit better with the timing of the annual membership mailshot in August.

Enclosed you will find the new season programme card, along with the AGM papers and garden bird survey form. The Committee has worked hard to put together a good and varied programme of events again this year - hopefully you will find many things of interest and worthy of support. Unfortunately it has not been possible to hold all the indoor meetings in our usual University venue (Room 109 in the Palmer Building) and other University venues are to be used. Details are in the Programme Card, and an annotated map of the University is also included, which should help you locate the right venue for each meeting.

The highlight of my year's birdwatching so far was a great week spent on Cyprus in late March. We like to visit new places each Spring and Cyprus proved to be a good choice, with its local specialities like Cyprus Warbler, Cyprus Wheatear, and Black Francolin along with good numbers of passage birds. With spring being rather late, we perhaps did not see as many migrants as hoped, but still managed to get fantastic views of both Little and Baillon's Crake, as well as Collared Flycatcher and Wryneck, to name but a few. We rented an apartment for the week we were there, which made for a pretty relaxing break as well, although my one (and only) session in our unheated and very chilly swimming pool was not one of the highlights!

On the subject of migrating birds you may well have heard recently about the work that the BTO has been doing with the tagging and tracking of Nightingales as part of their 'Out of Africa' project, in order to learn more about where the birds winter and hence what more can be done to try and ensure their survival. And this is just one element of this important work - described in a bit more detail in an item later in this newsletter.

As always, all contributions to the newsletter are much appreciated – please get contributions for the Autumn edition of the newsletter to me by 17th October, for inclusion in the Winter edition.

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

Welcome to the BOC's 2010/11 season!

Once again we have a full programme of talks beginning in September on through to April, with some great lecturers, some old friends and some new to us. Ornithological science is mixed with some outstanding bird photography. In January *One Show* presenter Mike Dilger, will be giving us an insight into some of the trials and tribulations of a wildlife presenter – it should be a memorable evening. Most of our indoor events are at the University of Reading, where this year for some talks we will be trying a new, somewhat less expensive room in the Humanities (HUMS) building. We realise that Reading is quite a trek for people living in the far East and West of the County, so the Committee will be seeking to hold some events elsewhere in Berkshire. Many thanks to Ray Reedman for organising the programme.

The excursions programme runs all year with local and more distant trips each month. Everyone is welcome – you absolutely do not have to be an experienced “birder”! There are several coach trips, but most rely on private transport: if you need a lift, please contact the trip leader who will try to help. This extensive programme is made possible by the many people who have volunteered to lead trips and collaborations with RSPB groups and the NDOC and we have to thank Bill Nicoll for putting it together.

An apology: we had hoped to be able to send out with this mailing a double year *Birds of Berkshire* for 2006 and 2007. That has not proved possible and we will get it to you as soon as we can. With more observers, more databases and more records, the job of maintaining the County bird database and creating the excellent reports that Colin Wilson, Chris Heard, Derek Barker, Ken Moore and many others have produced does not get easier! The editorial team and records committee – all committed volunteers - are working now on speeding the whole process without prejudicing accuracy.

This is a challenging time for bird conservation. As the current Berkshire and national Atlas surveys are showing, many species continue to decline, for example, Tree Sparrow, Willow Tit, Spotted Flycatcher and Turtle Dove. For some species, such as Stone Curlew, Little Ringed Plover and Nightingale, Berkshire is an important stronghold. Fortunately, there have been some great examples of habitat management in the County that really are helping some species: for example the conversion of old gravel workings to nature reserves (one of the best places to see wintering Bitterns in the UK is Dinton Pastures, just outside Reading) and the areas managed for Stone Curlew on the Berkshire Downs. Most of this type of conservation has been collaborations between voluntary organisations and the public sector which has provided much of the funding. But I fear that we may be faced with massive cuts in the funding of Natural England, local authorities *etc*; so pushing forward conservation will depend increasingly on organisations like the BOC – a real challenge for the immediate future.

Lastly, on the bright side, this year we have seen yet another new breeding species in the County, Oystercatchers, which bred at Theale and probably at least one other site. That makes at least seven new breeders since the last Atlas surveys in 1987/9: Red Kite, Little Egret, Lesser Black-back Gull, Herring Gull, Dartford Warbler and Raven. Not all bad news!
Renton Righelato

Philip White 1950 - 2010

Those who met Philip only after the onset of his debilitating illness will not know the quiet bird enthusiast who encouraged so many in the Club. He and Carole joined the ROC in 1977 and for 10 years from 1980 Philip was the Excursions Secretary. His role was to organise and lead every trip (with Carole's help), and many are in his debt for numerous memorable trips. At all times Philip was helpful and patient with those on the trips, and ever ready to share his extensive knowledge. It was due to Philip that my son Peter, then a young teenager, and I increased our knowledge of birds and their identification. However, we have yet to master bird song as Philip had done. I owe many "ticks" to Philip and will always associate him with my first experience of nightjars and the amusing incident when a bird skulking in some grass was identified as a quail. Unfortunately it then flew to the top of a bush and sang "a little bit of bread and no cheese"! He took me back to Wales to see my first red kite, to Portland Bill for pomarine skuas, and to many other sites which I enjoyed in his company. Others will share many such memories and we were saddened by his long illness. On behalf of all Club members I offer our deepest sympathy to Carole and on behalf of many I say "Thank you Philip".

John Roberts

And from Carole

“I would like to thank everyone for all their help and support during Phil's long illness, and all the kind wishes and sympathy cards received when he died.

I would also like to thank all those who attended the services at Bracknell Crematorium and at St Michael and St Mary Magdalene church, your presence made a difficult day so much easier for me and my family.”

Some Seats Left on the Coach to the BirdFair

There are still some places left on the Club trip to the Rutland-based British BirdFair on Saturday 21st August and, with a great day out guaranteed, what better way to pay it a visit than in a relaxed, sociable way on the BOC coach. For those who don't know what's in store, the Birdfair is a veritable feast of birding optics, photography, books, tours, talks, holidays and much more. Plus some good birding – osprey and tree sparrow are likely, not to mention some of the most famous faces in birdwaching! For more information try <http://www.birdfair.org.uk/>.

The coach will leave Newbury (Wharfe) at 6.30am, Reading University (main gate in Shinfield Road) at 7.00am and Bray Wick, Maidenhead (Hibbert Road) at 7.30am. A price of £27 will cover the transport and a day ticket to the Fair.

Contact Ray Reedman on 0118 986 4338 for further information and to book your place.

Out of Africa: For how much longer?

The news that the Cuckoo has been added to the red list of Birds of Conservation Concern was widely broadcast, but the British Trust for Ornithology are concerned about declines in many of our other African migrants. The Wood Warbler and Pied Flycatchers have undergone declines of 60% since 1994, Nightingales, Spotted Flycatchers and Garden Warblers also seem to be in trouble and even the Willow Warbler is close to being red-listed. This is an international problem clearly noticeable at a national level, and with worrying changes in distribution appearing in the 2007 -2011 Atlas maps, something is clearly causing a problem for our migrants.



To investigate the possible causes, the BTO has launched their 'Out of Africa' Appeal, to raise funds for projects to gather basic information, much of which is still unknown, such as when birds arrive in Africa, the habitats they use and how they move around within this vast continent. Even the key wintering grounds for several of our declining species remains a bit of a mystery and despite over 300,000 birds having been ringed, we still have no mid-winter recovery of a British or Irish bird.

Some of this information will be gathered through transect work in Africa, as part of a joint BTO/ RSPB collaboration, but the BTO will also be working with other European NGOs and with African BirdLife partners and local conservation groups. A number of smaller more species-specific projects will also be undertaken and closer to home, the data gathered via the BTO Nest Records and Ringing Schemes in the UK will be analysed.

Some of the questions we will be trying to answer are:

Is the decline in Spotted Flycatchers warning us of major changes in insect numbers? Are female Cuckoos out of synch with their key host species? Is it harder for Swifts to find suitable nesting sites? Is agricultural intensification in countries south of the Sahara having an effect on Turtle Doves? Where do Wood Warblers, our archetypal birds of oak woodland, spend the winter?

One of the species-specific projects will use tiny geo-locators on a handful of Nightingales from East Anglia. Information from their routes and locations, once they have departed from England, will then be downloaded once the birds are caught again the next spring on return to their favourite haunts.

Projects like these will help revolutionise our understanding of migration and, as part of a wider project with Birdlife partners in Europe and Africa, help to target effective, informed conservation action. To support the appeal or for more information, please visit our website www.bto.org or you can send a cheque (made out to "BTO") to BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU with a note explaining which appeal it is for or phone us on 01842 750050 to pay by card over the phone.

Rachel Irvine, BTO

And While We're on the Subject



Do you enjoy birds like the common nightingale, common cuckoo and barn swallow? What about warblers like the aquatic, reed and sedge? They, like many species of trans-Saharan migrants, are in trouble due to habitat loss, human pressure and climate change.

Please support the Bob Scott memorial appeal which is raising money to assist those birds whilst they are in Africa.

You can just donate or enter the quiz and try to win a sunbird holiday in the gambia, 8x20 swarovski binoculars, £500 worth of birdguides gifts or a super Simon King photo of cheetahs.

To donate or download the quiz go to www.birdguides.com/bobscott

Thank you for your support.

Can you Help Monitor Reading Council's Bird Conservation Measures?

By Giles Sutton, Ecologist, Reading Borough Council

National government guidance for planning authorities given in Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation states that 'planning decisions should aim to maintain, and enhance, restore or add to biodiversity'. Councils also have a legal duty under the 2006 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity when exercising their functions.

This legislation and planning policy empowers local authorities to request that ecological enhancements be provided within development schemes. In Reading the council asks for ecological enhancements in new development where appropriate including wildlife friendly landscaping, the provision of bird and bat boxes and ecological management plans for entire sites. Recent examples include an ecological management plan for the Reading University redevelopment (in conjunction with Wokingham Borough Council), including swift and sparrow boxes on new buildings, an ecological management plan for the Foudry Brook and adjacent land as part of the Kennet Island development, swift and house martin boxes on The Reading Central One development and bird and bat boxes in a number of residential developments.

Providing nesting sites in new developments is a good start. However in order to ensure that future schemes work it will be necessary to monitor the success of these schemes and there may be scope for some voluntary monitoring of nest boxes in selected developments. If you would like volunteer please contact Renton Righelato (email at renton.righelato@berksoc.org.uk or tel 0787 981 2564).

Note added by Renton for urban members: the Swift Conservation website has plenty of advice on nest boxes that can be fitted on walls and under eaves (<http://www.swift-conservation.org/>). I have just bought a couple for my house in Reading.

BOC Trip to Blashford Lakes NR, January 2010

With the thaw still a very recent memory, this trip was a wonderful release from the winter lock-down. About a dozen of us enjoyed some good birding that day...

Most of us met early, just north of Blashford, where the Avon floods onto water-meadows near Harford. The immediate reward was a family group of Bewick's Swans among the Mute Swans, as well as the odd Little Egret, Buzzard and Water Rail. No sign though of either of the two Great Egrets which had been reported during the days before.

When we joined the rest of the group at Blashford, we started to spot some of the woodland birds, but decided to try our luck on Ibsley Water first. Unfortunately for both us and for the Ruddy Ducks, there had been a cull a few days before and the remaining birds were both comparatively sparse and nervous on what is normally a very rich lake. A lot of Wigeon, a few Pintails, and a Goosander or two didn't provide close viewing. Another lake was dense with Gadwall and Coots.



The walk round scrub and woodland paths back to the centre found us Siskins and Nuthatches, as well as Redwings and Mistle Thrushes, but it was at the centre and at the Woodland Hide that things really livened up. First, a pair of Treecreepers was spotted right by the cars as we took a coffee break, then we enjoyed the spectacle of dozens and dozens of finches and tits at the hide feeders – including Bramblings, Siskins, Lesser Redpolls a-plenty. A short session at the Bittern Hide produced an immediate grandstand view of a Cetti's Warbler in front of the window, while a few Long-tailed Tits tried to confuse the eye in the reeds around it. At this point we heard that one of the Great Egrets was showing well in the flashes, so decided to have a second go at finding it. As we drove into the lay-by, it was seen flying away to disappear in a reedy side-water. Half an hour more produced nothing but a large flash of white and the distracting flight of one of his little cousins.

But I had a different sort of finale up my sleeve, so we travelled back up to Lyndhurst and made our way to the Blackwater Arboretum. The day had been improving steadily to give a bright sunny afternoon, which was ideal. It took ten minutes and the sharp eyes of a young stranger to pick up the first of our Hawfinches, which was sitting on a sunny branch in the canopy of a conifer. Later, others started to arrive in the tree-tops. The odd Marsh Tit was a little harder to identify on a similar high perch, as our sightings of the magnificent finches crept well into double figures. A few moments of distraction was provided by a small group of Bullfinches in nearby low bushes. I have witnessed this evening roost of the Hawfinches several times, but have never seen the birds in greater numbers or so well as that afternoon. For most of those with me it was a new experience and their enjoyment was a pleasure to behold.

Some Coal Tits entertained us as we walked back to the cars, but we hadn't finished, as my passengers managed to round off the day with a flock of Golden Plovers in a flooded field by the motorway. It had been a truly refreshing day out.

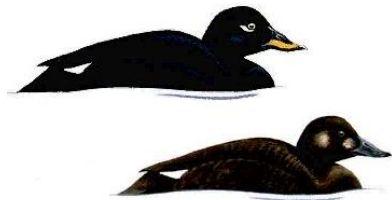
Ray Reedman

BOC Weekend Trip to Norfolk – February 2010

In New Zealand they talk about the variability of their weather, giving rise to a song lyric referring to “Four seasons in one day” and, while our trip to East Anglia didn’t quite match that, it did get pretty close to four seasons in one weekend! From warm sunshine through to heavy snow, we had everything, but despite the unpredictability of the weather we managed a record count of species, all due (of course) to the excellent organisation and planning of our leader Colin Wilson.

The weekend really got under way, after an early start from Berkshire, with a very welcome breakfast at our regular meeting point at Tesco’s near Ipswich. Refreshed and refuelled we then (mostly) successfully tracked down some Waxwings in an Ipswich urban garden before heading to Minsmere. With the weather dry, but cold, we added some excellent birds to the list, including Bittern, Bearded Tit, Smew and Red and Black Throated Divers. With rain starting to fall we headed north to Lowestoft where a visit to the ‘picturesque’ Ness gave us views of Purple Sandpipers along the rocky shoreline, before our last visit of the day took us to the roost site at Stubbs Mill, Hickling. The weather by now was fairly miserable, but our perseverance was rewarded with Merlin, Marsh and Hen Harriers coming in the reedbeds, while those who braved the elements the longest saw the Crane’s arrival at dusk.

After a comfortable night in our very reasonable hotel in Yarmouth, the weather next morning brought rain and a cold wind. Mediterranean Gulls on the beach were some compensation, but at Breydon Water the rain turned to sleet and we soon returned to the cars before heading north towards Norwich. Reports from Whittingham Coutry Park sounded promising, so we plotted our way to this new site for us. It was to prove an excellent choice, with the sun breaking through and some shelter from the wind, a good variety of wildfowl were seen on the large lake, including Smew, Ruddy Duck and Scaup along with other highlights of Kingfisher and Red Necked Grebe. Our last stop of the day was on the North Norfolk coast, where a superb flock of Snow Buntings had gathered by the beach car park at Salthouse.



Saturday morning, after a night in our usual hotel (The Burleigh) in Hunstanton, brought a marked improvement in the weather with mild sunny conditions making our session on the beach at Titchwell a surprisingly pleasant experience. The birdwatching did not disappoint either with Twite and Spotted Redshank on the salt marsh and Mealy Redpoll and Water Rail near the reserve centre, while diligent sea watching gave us Slavonian Grebe and Velvet Scoter amongst the large offshore raft of Common Scoter. A visit to Holkham disappointed in that no Shore Larks were found, but a variety of wintering geese were seen (a lone Snow Goose having

been seen earlier among the Pink Foots in a field near Titchwell) and several Barn Owls were busy hunting in broad daylight.

After the weather of Saturday, Sunday morning came as something of a surprise, with a bitter wind being bringing light snow flurries. An early morning walk along the beach near Holme was cut short and a fairly rapid retreat was beaten to the hotel for breakfast, but not before we had enjoyed the antics of a very frisky flock of Long Tailed Ducks close to the shore. As we ate our breakfast, the view through the window was becoming obscured by the ever increasing snow and, by the time we had packed and booked out of the hotel, conditions had turned positively arctic. With snow settling on the roads, driving was becoming fairly hazardous and there was little option but to abandon any further plans for birdwatching, and the party duly dispersed and headed home to the ‘safety’ of Berkshire. Thus ended a ‘very interesting’ weekend, with weather of amazing variety and birds (totalling around 140 species!) to match.

Ted Rogers

Christmas Lunch 2010

Those of us who have enjoyed past Christmas walks and lunches owe thanks to Dot Lincoln who did most, if not all, of the organising. Dot has now passed on responsibility to Carole White who is now beginning to organise the walk and lunch venue for December 2010. Regulars will know the pleasure of this sociable day and when full details appear in the Programme early booking is advised. Turkey is usually seen after these walks but there is no guarantee about other sightings.

John Roberts

Plea for Member's Email Addresses

Can I put in a special plea for members, who have not already done so, to let me have their email addresses. We do have them for about half of the membership, but it is really useful if we can contact as many members as possible at short notice with Club news or announcements. A good example was during the last indoor season when the Reading University venue for our meeting had to be changed at very late notice and we struggled to let people know of the change. A simple email to me at the address shown below will tell me all I need to know. I can also send the Newsletter via email in Microsoft Word format, but if you would prefer to continue to receive the Newsletter by post let me know at the same time.

Many thanks.

Ted Rogers

Subscription Change Reminder

You will know by now that subscriptions will change from October this year, as follows:-

Single	£20	(Single Retired	£15)
Family	£25	(Family Retired	£19)
Country	£15	Student	£10

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

If you pay by Banker's Order you can reduce your payment by £2. Just in case you need it, a blank form is printed below.

Do please remember to change your bank standing order in good time.

John Roberts

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: