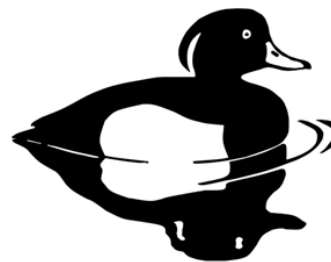


BOC Newsletter

Autumn 2010

No 51



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Introduction

For the first time the electronic version of the newsletter will be sent out in PDF format, so that it can be read using freely available Acrobat Reader software (see <http://get.adobe.com/uk/reader/> for software), avoiding any problems that people may have had with the use of Word format. I have also changed the dates on which I intend to produce the quarterly Newsletter, mainly to align better with the Club's annual mailshot. From now on, newsletters will come out in early November, early February, early May and then (with the annual mailshot) in early August. If you have any items for publication please bear these dates in mind.

Following the change in member's subscription rates this year, there have been a number of problems with people paying incorrect rates (despite our best efforts to inform people of the changes). The item below from John Roberts asks that members who are unclear about how much they have paid (or should pay) contact him or Dot to help clear things up. **Do please help John and Dot to sort it out the confusion.**

Please note that the next newsletter will go out in early February 2011, so can I ask that any relevant items get to me by mid January.

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

Subs by Standing Order (S.O.)

In a recent Newsletter, when reminding you of the subs. increase I asked " Will you be the one not to amend your S.O.?" Well, there are over 90 of you who have left their payment at the old rate. Dot Lincoln and I will need to resolve each of these unchanged payments .With your cooperation the situation will be clarified, but it will take time. If you have doubts about your S.O. please see one of us at a meeting, or contact us by phone, Dot on 0118 9427563, or myself on 0118 9482137. If we do not hear from you, you may be hearing from us!

John Roberts

Editor's Note: The new rates were in each of the last 3 Newsletters, but are shown again below, just in case.

New Club Membership Rates

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

The retired rates are a reduction of the full rates and are available to those pensioners who wish to opt for that lower rate. And, as an incentive, if you pay by Banker's Order you can reduce your payment by £2.

Another Plea for Member's Email Addresses

Can I put in another plea for members to let me have their email addresses. We do have them for over 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.

A simple email to me at the address shown below will tell me all I need to know. I will also send the Newsletter by email (in PDF format so that everyone should be able to read it using readily available Acrobat Reader software), but if you would prefer to receive the newsletter by post then please let me know at the same time. Many thanks.

Ted Rogers

Mike Dilger Meeting on 19th January 2011

We are having a "special " raffle for this meeting.

The prizes are :-

- 1st - Robert Gillmor's original Dotterel water colour,
(as used on the cover of the 2004 Report).
- 2nd - Gordon Langsbury's kingfisher photograph printed on canvas.
- 3rd - £25 voucher from Henry Street Garden Centre
- 4th - "Birds Britannica" by Mark Cocker and Richard Mabey



Those of you who do not attend meetings will not have had the opportunity to buy tickets, and may wish to do so. Tickets are £1 each (in books of 5) and they can be purchased from me by post or by arrangement via a telephone call to 0118 9482137. I will readily send books to members on a sale or return basis. We would welcome your support in selling/buying tickets as we are hoping the raffle income and the sponsorship from London Camera Exchange and Kowa will cover the cost of this meeting. The prizes are excellent ones and I hope you will support this initiative by your Committee. I wait to hear from you.

John Roberts

Printing Appeal

The Club has various requirements for printing, including publicity material, newsletters etc. Until recently we have been able to get this done cheaply and conveniently with the help of one of our Committee members (many thanks Ruth). Unfortunately this is no longer possible and we are now having to pay commercial rates for our printing. If any member has access to printing facilities that we might be able to use it would be very much appreciated. Please contact me if you can help.

Ted Rogers

Photographic Competition – March 16th 2011

Don't forget to get shooting for next year's competition - we should have the same two categories of Action and Portrait and hope for yet another excellent evening of entertainment from our judges.

The rules will remain largely as 2010, but watch the website for any minor changes. Last date to get them to Colin for inclusion is 2 March 2011. Send by email to colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk or by post on a CD to Colin at Blakeney, St Catherine's Road, Camberley, Surrey, GU16 9NP

Berkshire Bird Atlas: Winter Survey Progress

The data that form the basis of the new atlas come from winter and summer timed tetrad surveys (TTVs) by specific surveyors and “roving” records from any observers. Winter TTVs are 93% complete: 27 of the 394 tetrads in Berkshire remain to be completed. The main gaps are in Reading, Slough and in the west of the county.

The median number of species recorded from TTVs and roving records is 48. However, 108 of Berkshire’s 394 squares show fewer than 41 species and 15 fewer than 21. As we would expect most tetrads to have at least 40 wintering species, and those with varied habitats including water in excess of 50, we are asking all observers to help by submitting roving records. Individual species distribution maps for the whole county are on the BOC website (<http://www.berksoc.org.uk/atlas/maps/atlas.html>): these can help you identify the likely species gaps in individual tetrads.

Looking overall at the county, in addition to the commoner species that are almost certainly present in the many tetrads in which they have not so far been recorded, some particular gaps appear to be:

- (a) **Water Rail**, which is probably more widespread than so far recorded, can be heard at any time of day or night, but probably most often around dusk.
- (b) **Tawny, Little, Barn Owls**, which are sparsely recorded and for which breeding evidence may be obtained in the winter.
- (c) **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, which, while clearly declining, is easily overlooked and most readily found in the late winter.
- (d) **Kestrel**, which appears surprisingly scarce in the SE of the county (SU86/96) and **Sparrowhawk**, which is widespread but has eluded us in many tetrads.

The winter survey months are 1st November to the end of February. Records are best submitted via the BTO website: <http://www.bto.org/birdatlas/index.htm>.

Renton Righelato

North Wessex Farmland Bird Project Seeks Keen Volunteer Bird Surveyors for 2011 and Onwards

An exciting new project on Farmland Birds has recently begun in the Berkshire and Hampshire Downs, and volunteer bird surveyors are being sought to survey farms in the area.

The North Wessex Farmland Bird Project, funded jointly by the RSPB and Natural England, roughly covers the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in Hampshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire, with an aim of boosting numbers of farmland bird species. The area holds key populations of nationally declining farmland bird species, such as corn bunting, grey partridge and lapwing, so it is important to maintain and increase numbers in this stronghold and help re-populate the surrounding countryside.

Diane Nicolle is North Wessex Downs Farmland Bird Project Officer based at the NWD AONB office in Hungerford, and her role is to work with farmers and land managers in the area, encouraging them to enter or renew environmental stewardship (ES) schemes, choosing the management options that will provide most benefit to farmland birds. These need to provide the ‘Big 3’ – nesting habitat, insects as summer food, and seed as winter food.

As part of the project Diane is working closely with the Volunteer and Farmer Alliance scheme (V&FA), an RSPB initiative where farmers can have 3 or 4 free bird surveys carried out in one year on their farm. The farmer is then sent a laminated map of these results, with information about the birds found on the farm during the surveys. Most farmers are very interested in the wildlife on their land, especially arable birds, and are keen to know more, so they appreciate the map whilst also hopefully gaining a positive impression of the RSPB, birders and nature conservationists in general. This can prove invaluable when Diane is building a new relationship with a farmer and encouraging him or her to choose ES options that provide most benefit for farmland birds and other arable wildlife. The map can also be used to support a farmer’s application to the competitive Higher Level Stewardship scheme, as one of the criteria is having certain species of farmland bird on or near the farm.

Diane is keen to find volunteers living in or near to the North Wessex Downs AONB in Berks, Hants or Oxon who would like to get involved in V&FA by carrying out 3-4 surveys on a farm near their home in 2011 or years thereafter. Volunteers are placed on a list and matched to a local farm if there is one that has asked for a survey to be carried out. This does mean that there is no guarantee that a volunteer will be given a farm to survey straight away, but we try to match people up as soon as a suitable farm and volunteer become available. The surveys are carried out between April and June and results sent to the Regional V&FA Officer who produces the map and sends this and further information back to the farmer.

If you are interested in becoming involved with the V&FA, or would like to know any more about the North Wessex Farmland Bird Project, please contact Diane on 01488 680452, or diane.nicolle@rspb.org.uk.

Note: Diane came along to the BOC indoor meeting on October 27th to talk about the project.

Membership Development - an opportunity to help

The Club is establishing some Committees to assist in focusing on important areas of Club activities. One of the Committees will look at the offering for existing membership and how we could do better. It will also look at how we can increase the Club's membership including, for example, how we add younger people to the mix.

The Membership Development Committee will initially be chaired by Colin Wilson aided by Ted Rogers, our Newsletter Editor and Ruth Angus who has been looking after our publicity so well for a long time. But, we would like to have some new ideas on how we should improve the Club. No experience is needed but if you think we could do better and are willing to assist in helping us support members with communications or in other ways please contact Colin by email on colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk or by calling him on 01252 837411.

There is no obligation if you simply ask about what might be involved – we can't be certain we know yet as this is a new idea and we want to see how it goes. We hope it will be a sociable Committee all helping to improve the Club for its members.

Conservation Notes

Much work was done over the 2009/10 winter at Hosehill LNR largely funded by Aggregates Levy and organised by Pang, Kennet and Lambourn Projects Group, with support from the BOC Conservation Fund and Theale Area Bird Conservation Group. The major part of the work involved excavating a pool and channels in a reedbed to encourage wintering Bitterns. Bitterns used this patch in previous years but the reeds had become too dense for them.

Update on earlier projects supported by the BOC conservation fund:

The Berkshire woodlands project, BeWild, is a three year project to encourage more woodland management to create better wildlife habitat. The project ends in April 2011. Bird, bat and Dormouse boxes continue to be erected. Coppicing, ride widening and thinning have taken place renewing shrub layer important to a range of birds as has been shown recently for Marsh Tits. Adjacent hedgerows have been laid to renew growth to provide nesting opportunity and continuity of habitat. Outlets for wood products such as installing woodchip boilers will help to encourage future woodland management.

Lapwings again bred at Paices Wood where BOC funding helped fence the area to lessen disturbance. Wood Larks also used the area again and bred on adjacent land.

Barn Owl boxes supported by BOC funding successfully attracted Barn Owls. Most boxes in the areas concerned had evidence of occupation, and breeding was attempted in possibly 40%.

Reading Borough Council has consulted the BOC on a number of issues recently, including the creation of a wetland reserve on Fobney Island and potential mitigation measures in planning applications. The possible development of Fobney Island has reached a detailed planning stage and, all being well, the project will get off the ground in the next year or so.



Garden Bird Survey

Can I thank all those members who continue to complete their Garden Bird Survey forms. I remain hopeful that we can link up our data with the BTO (who run their own garden bird surveys) to produce reports about the status of birds in Berkshire gardens. A while ago I had a meeting with the BTO rep for this area of work and it still looks to be a real possibility. Can I also thank those of you who included 'breeding bird' information on their forms – I intend to use this as input to the BTO Bird Atlas data.

Ted Rogers