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## **Introduction**

Despite the continued mild weather, the arrival of typical winter visitors like redwings, fieldsfares and waxwings signal the coming winter, but what sort of winter will we have this time? Some people are forecasting another very severe one, but as always we shall just have to wait and see. And it's always worth remembering that, if nothing else, a harsh winter means more birds visiting gardens and so it might not be all bad news!

I'm sure that everyone will, by now, have heard of the very sad and untimely death of Gordon Langsbury, but I mention it again here, just in case anyone missed the news. A top bird photographer, he was a great supporter of the Club and President for over 10 years. Needless to say, he will be much missed by everyone in the Club, his family and all who knew him. As a memorial to him a new trophy will be competed for at our annual Photographic Competition – see item below.

Please note that the next newsletter will go out in March 2012, so can I ask that any relevant items get to me by the end of February. Can I also wish all members and their families a good Christmas and happy New Year.

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

## **Call for Bird Records**

Work is starting on the species accounts for the new Berkshire Atlas and Avifauna which we aim to be as up to date as possible (up to 2011). Work is also running in parallel on the 2009 and 2010 annual Bird Reports. So we need your records for 2009, 2010 urgently and for 2011 as soon as possible. If you submit records via Berks Bird Bulletin, berksbirds or Bird Track then we already have them. If not, please put them in online or email them to [webmaster@berksbirds.co.uk](mailto:webmaster@berksbirds.co.uk) as soon as you can.

It is a great help if records are submitted electronically. However, written records can be sent to the County Recorder (Chris Heard, 3 Waterside Lodge, Ray Mead Road, Maidenhead, Berks, SL6 8NP) or you can send them to me and we will enter them into the database. Some records of rarer species require a description (see <http://www.berksbirds.co.uk/submittinrecords.asp>).

Work on the annual reports for 2006, 2007 and 2008 is well advanced: the systematic lists have been completed and it is hoped that the reports will be published within a few months.

Renton Righelato

## **Robert Gillmor Retrospective at Reading Museum and Programme of Events**

The Club is delighted to have been involved in planning for the Robert Gillmor Retrospective exhibition which started at Reading Museum at the end of October. The John Madejski Gallery now holds a wonderful selection of Robert's work including some of his very earliest work from his schooldays. We encourage members to enjoy the exhibition which is there daily until at least the end of March 2012.



The Club has a strong association with Robert, a President Emeritus and a member since it's very earliest days when known as Reading Ornithological Club. As a consequence of this association and at Robert's request, we have organised a number of events for early 2012 to which members are invited. Details are below or on <http://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/events/talks/15> Please come along on any of the days for a talk or a walk. Watch the Reading Museum website or Club website, newsletters and emails for more information.

The exhibition coincides with the publication of a delightful new book *Birds, Blocks & Stamps* by Reading publisher, Two Rivers Press which explains amongst much more, how Robert went about producing the lino cut designs for a set of postage stamps called 'Post and Go' now available from special machines in major post offices such as Reading town centre. The small book is available for £12.50 from Two Rivers Press at <http://tworiverspress.com/wp/birds-blocks-and-stamps/>

The programme of events arranged by the BOC (all free to everybody) is as follows

- 12 January 2012 - **Talk: Tufted Ducks and their cousins - behind the image** – Ray Reedman – Reading Museum 13.00 – 13.45
- 23 February - **Walk: Tufted Ducks and their cousins** – Find the ducks - Led by Ray Reedman at Dinton Pastures, Car Park Mohawk Way, Woodley, RG5 4UE at 10.00 – 12.00
- 25 February - **Birders' Day at the Museum**: a day when your Committee and volunteers will talk casually to visitors about birding experiences and encourage membership of the Club. There will be two talks '150 years of birds and birdwatching in Berkshire' by Renton Righelato at 12.00 to 12.45 and another from Neil Bucknell entitled 'The Birds of Berkshire - the challenge of recording and illustrating our avian history' at 14.00 to 14.45.  
**Great news! Robert is expected to join us on the 25th, which should add even more to the day.**
- 28 March - **Talk: Spring Chorus in Reading** – Colin Wilson, learn birdsong you'll hear around Reading this year. At 13.00 – 13.45
- 19 April - **Walk: Spring Chorus in Reading** – Find the singing birds - Led by Colin Wilson at Dinton Pastures, Car Park Mohawk Way, Woodley, RG5 4UE at 09.00 – 11.00

## **Mist, Fruitfulness and Accounts**

October brings the season of mists, mellow fruitfulness, and the Club accounts. Sometimes the mist settles upon the accounts, but I keep that to myself. For all of my past 17 years as Treasurer our colleague Donald Reid has seen the accounts through to their conclusion, but ill-health has prevented Donald's involvement this year. I use this note to send him our best wishes and I hope that next year I will again see his red ticks throughout the accounts. This year I thank Donald's son Daniel and his staff, particularly John Whittle, for the completion of our accounts at no charge to the Club.

Dealing with the accounts led me to browse through old records and I share some information with you. The first entry in our records is a donation of £1 given by "Mr Caffyn to start this Society." That entry is dated 15<sup>th</sup> Nov 1946. The first recorded membership subscription is J.M. Barry, Shinfield, 5 shillings\* on 18<sup>th</sup> Feb 1947. Some of the early expenses are for the lantern operator, the epidiascope operator and the cost of the first bus to Slimbridge was £12.3.6. The profit from a Peter Scott lecture was £14.15.4. The first entry I have found for "Mr. Gillmor" is 14<sup>th</sup> Nov 1950, paying a student membership of 3 shillings. In the mid-50's we begin to see income from "Mr Gillmor's Christmas Cards". It was 1960 before the Club had annual income in excess of £100.

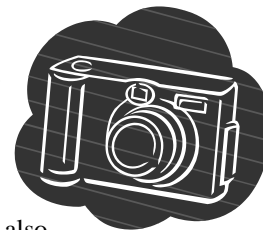
We have moved on since then with this year's income exceeding £10,000 and our capital standing at £15,000. I wonder if the accounts always balanced in the 1950's.

John Roberts

\*Editor's Note: For those of you too young (or too old?) to remember, the "shilling" was an ancient British coin which disappeared, with decimalisation, in 1971 ☺

### **Get Shooting for the 2012 Photographic Competition!**

In 2012 we will be revamping the annual competition in memory of Gordon Langsbury. The ultimate prize will be the Gordon Langsbury Memorial trophy a new trophy in his memory and as agreed with Gordon last year, we are introducing a new category of 'Birds in flight' in view of the many excellent images we have seen in recent years. We are delighted that David Cromack has agreed to support us again as an expert judge and publisher and he will be joined in 2012 by our very own Dickie Duckett FRPS, a superb photographer in his own right. We are also delighted Stuart Langsbury, Gordon's son, will be there to present the trophy to the first winner.



Up to four entries for each of the three categories are permitted. The closing date is strictly 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2012 and earlier entries would be much appreciated to enable the judges to have a preview and have considered comments on the night. As always members will choose the winner of the trophy on the night.

Remember a new winner has been chosen in each of the last 9 years, often photographers with limited experience and with images of common British birds, so get shooting or sorting through those old images and make the evening as enjoyable as it always has been. Apart from the Cup there will be six voucher prizes on offer!

Have a look at the rules (see below) and if you need help give Colin a call or email him.

### **Photographic Competition 2012 Rules**

In 2012, we are offering 3 digital photo categories in our competition (as follows), so get shooting now!

- Best bird portrait
- Best bird action or behaviour photograph (non flight)
- Best bird in flight

Each of the three categories will be judged and winners chosen by Dave Cromack and Dickie Duckett FRPS. The meeting will then, on a show of hands, choose the overall winner who will win the new Gordon Langsbury Memorial Trophy, currently held by Dave Bartlett for his Blue Tit portrait. Gift vouchers will be given in all categories for first place and second place. Additional prizes may be supplied on the night. You may enter photographs entered before if you wish, so if you think one didn't get the attention it deserved feel free to try again. We encourage newcomers to show their photographs, an experienced photographer certainly does not win every time! You just might have the picture to catch the judges attention! Due to time limitations on the night, we have changed the number of entries per section to just four, so you still have up to twelve chances to win prizes on the night so have a look through your photos and give it a go!

### **Overall rules**

- Photographs will be of wild, non captive birds only
- The competition is open to paid up members of the BOC.
- No more than four entries per category per entrant.
- Entrants agree to any entered photographs being displayed by the BOC on its website and used for Club and competition publicity purposes, at the Club's discretion. This may entail use of images in national publications in which case BOC will request compensation is paid to photographers.
- The BOC will make all reasonable attempts to ensure acknowledgement is given to photographers whose work is used in this way.
- The Club will not permit any use of photographs for any other commercial reasons by any other party and will ensure full details are given of photographers to enable them to negotiate terms with any publisher.
- Photographs will be judged on all factors including exposure, colour cast, focus, composition and form. The decision of the judges is final.
- Limited image manipulation is permissible e.g. removal of a twig or blade of grass, but no major changes to the bird image itself. Adjustment to exposure, sharpening, colour correction, sensor dust spotting and cropping and resizing is acceptable.
- The images, regardless of file size, image size and resolution will be adapted by the BOC for presentation as they see fit but without responsibility for the results.
- Closing date for entries is 2 March 2012. Images should be emailed to [colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk](mailto:colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk) or sent on a CD to the following address: Blakeney, St. Catherine's Road, Frimley Green, Surrey, GU16 9NP. Any questions please telephone 01252 837411.

## Recent Indoor Meetings (or what you may have missed!)

### **October 26<sup>th</sup> – Chris Gooddie “The Jewel Hunter”**



In his own words, Chris Gooddie “set fire to a carefully constructed career ladder and warmed his hands over the flames” and then set off in the crazy pursuit of all the world’s 32 species of pitta (the bird that is, not to be confused with those flat breads so beloved of kebab sellers!). The commonly used name of “jewel-thrushes” gave rise to his use of the term ‘jewel hunter’ and Chris gave us an exhaustive and exhausting account of his travels around Asia and beyond in his search for these beautiful and elusive birds. His love of birds in general (and pittas in particular) was self evident, as was his fearless (and possibly reckless) desire to reach his goal of seeing all the pitta species in one year. His interesting and often humorous account of his travels and experiences, accompanied by pictures of the places he visited and birds he saw (including some of the undoubtedly beautiful pittas), certainly made for a good evening which was much enjoyed, I’m sure, by all who attended. I even bought a copy of his book (and an excellent read it is too), which he helpfully inscribed with “only 32 to go” upon discovering that, to my shame, I have yet to lay my eyes on a single “jewel”!

### **November 9<sup>th</sup> – Marek Borkowski “Wildlife of Poland”**

Marek Borkowski has long championed the wildlife and wildlife habitats of his native Poland, particularly the fragile marshlands that run down through the centre of the country. Sporting an impressive beard, he explained the history of the marshes which were once maintained as a barrier against invasions, but with changing times have come under pressure from development and agricultural change. He now proudly owns part of the famous Biebrza Marshes, where he lives with his wife and children, and referred to some of this wonderful habitat as his “garden”, with its breeding population of the endangered great snipe and a variety of other flora and fauna. He also talked about his championing of the use of semi-wild Konik horses (closely related to the extinct Tarpan) to maintain the marshland habitat, due to their unique adaptations to the conditions (having big feet and the ability to eat woody stems of invasive bushes etc). Despite having a few problems with his “German” slide projector (not sure if it really was German or some sort of Polish joke), the talk gave a great insight into this fantastic area of Poland, ending with the hope that, in some way, the EU can find a way to ensure its future. He apologised for his English, which admittedly was delivered with a fairly strong accent, but it did make you concentrate on what he was saying and the talk, if nothing else, certainly made a very good case for visiting the area very soon!

Note: I believe that Konik horses can be seen on several wildlife reserves around England, including Stodmarsh in Kent and Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire.

### **November 23<sup>rd</sup> – AGM + Dickie Duckett**

And for those of you who missed this year’s AGM (shame on you!), this is a brief account of the meeting.

After the usual apologies for absence and agreeing of last year’s AGM minutes, the meeting continued with the Treasurer’s Report, which showed the Club’s finances to be a good state, bearing in mind that expenditure on the upcoming publication of annual reports. All of the existing Officers had agreed to continue and were elected unopposed. Three new Ordinary Committee Members were recommended to the meeting, being Tim Ball, Martin Sell and Carole White, who were also duly elected (we hope their time of the Committee will be an enjoyable and productive one). The Chairman’s Report was then followed by a brief resume of the birding highlights for Berkshire over the previous 12 months, before the AGM was formally closed.

In the sad absence of Gordon Langsbury, Dickie Duckett had kindly agreed to substitute and duly treated the meeting to a range of his fabulous photographs. He paid tribute to Gordon by showing a number of pictures of waders (Gordon’s favourite family of birds) before taking us around various locations in the UK and Romania, and finished by taking us south to Antarctica. While acknowledging that the projector does not always do full justice to the images, the quality of the pictures was undeniable and much appreciated by all present. His anecdotes added to the enjoyment, including his memorable encounter with a Red Grouse that took boldness to a new level by climbing on top of him as he took pictures!

Ted Rogers

### **Local Wildlife Event at The Living Rainforest**

During the last weeks of the school summer holidays, a small group of local organisations (Butterfly Conservation, Berks Moth Group, RDNS, and BOC) participated in an educational activity to promote local wildlife to visitors to the Living Rainforest.

Ricki Bull, Jan Haseler, Trish Marcouse, Prof. Michael Keith-Lucas and I jointly set up a static exhibition and alternated in providing a series of short talks on our special interests during a two-week period. The audiences were mainly family groups, sometimes of three generations. My contribution on behalf of BOC was a focus on identifying and feeding garden birds.

Ray Reedman



### **Reshaping Fobney Island**

For some years, the BOC has been working with the sponsors, Reading Borough Council, the Environment Agency, Thames Water and the Thames Valley Restoration Trust, to help design a wetland reserve just to the south of Reading centre, between the River Kennet and the Kennet & Avon Canal. This is now coming to fruition with a £500,000 project that started in September.

The project will see the island turned into a rich new wetland and wildflower hay-meadow habitat. The site is expected to attract a vast array of wildlife, including birds, bats, water voles, and otters. These works, together with river restoration on the River Kennet, will make the island a more enjoyable place for people to visit, especially for bird watchers and anglers.

The river restoration works will include restoring 310 metres of the River Kennet and introducing new river gravels to the channel to create 'riffles'. Pools, scrapes and reed-beds are to be created and the scheme will include two bird hides with views across the new wetlands. Information boards at the site entrance points will provide information about the Wetland Park and its wildlife.

Graham Scholey, Conservation Technical Specialist, said: "This project will make a real difference to the diversity of wildlife at the site and I'm delighted we were able to start this week. Fobney Island is already very popular with local residents, and we hope the improvements will encourage even more people to enjoy this natural area.

The council will continue to manage and maintain the island after the work and will also be looking to volunteers to help with maintenance. We hope that BOC members will take part in a Friends of Fobney Island volunteer group that will be established with support from the project partners to help maintain the site and provide on-going educational opportunities. More details soon.

Renton Righelato

### **Woolhampton Quarry Nature Reserve**

The Club has been invited to sit on the Steering Group for this new nature reserve and we are pleased to announce that Ken White (also our joint Berkshire BTO Rep) will be our representative. Ken will be ably assisted by Sarah Priest our other joint BTO Rep.

On another note, we are sure all the members will join us in wishing Ken and Sarah congratulations on their marriage which is due to take place before this newsletter is published. Subsequently we understand Sarah will become a White and we will lose a Priest!

### **News from Greenham Common**

Heathland birds on Greenham common: monitoring and survey work over the last three years by BBOWT on Greenham Common, part-supported by a grant from the BOC's Conservation Fund, has shown that despite two hard winters, the numbers of breeding Dartford Warblers and Stonechats have remained steady. The same was true of most of the ground-nesting species monitored: Ringed and Little Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Redshank and Woodlark, though there is a suggestion that Skylark numbers fell.

Adrian Mitchell's excellent report can be downloaded at <http://www.bbowt.org.uk/content.asp?did=24722>

### **BOC Excursion to Farlington Marshes, November 2011**

About ten of us enjoyed a bright and breezy visit to Farlington Marshes, near Portsmouth.

This is always a good site for seeing Brent Geese close to and we were not disappointed in that. A few Skylarks and Starlings showed up in the grazing areas, but a stiff south-easterly kept passerine sightings to a minimum. However we did have excellent sightings of Buzzard, Kestrel and Marsh Harrier.

As the tide rose we were able to enjoy plenty of waders, with some large flocks of Grey Plovers and Dunlin in particular, as well as plenty of Redshanks, Oystercatchers and Black-tailed Godwits. Little Egrets and Herons crowned one of the off-shore island-roosts, while flock of twenty or more Avocets clung to a grassy knoll until they floated off on the tide. Dozens of Shelduck and several Red-breasted Mergansers were seen on the water. The stars, though,

were the two Black-necked Grebes, one of which came quite close. At high tide, the main pool was crammed with a mass of waders and ducks. Top birds here were a pair of sleeping Pintails, always a real joy to see.

After a snack, we moved round to a crowded car park at the Hayling Oyster-beds, where we had closer views of several sizeable wader flocks, including a large flock of Ringed Plovers on one of the off-shore bars. There were a couple of Little Grebes in the pools, as well a female Red-breasted Merganser. Very good views of a Rock Pipit concluded the day.

Ray Reedman



### **Call for Gardens with Parakeets for Feeding Competition Research**

Project Parakeet at Imperial College London is researching competition for food between the UK's non-native population of parakeets and garden birds.

We are looking for people with bird feeders that are regularly visited by parakeets and who would be willing for us to put up a squirrel proof bird feeder in their garden for a yearlong observational experiment that will begin in November 2011. Garden owners are required to carry out 20 min weekly observations of birds feeding from sunflower seed feeders installed by the project. The main requirement of the experiment is that the garden has regular visits of parakeets to bird feeders. Here's some information on what is involved:



#### **Why are we carrying out this study?**

The feeding experiment will allow us to investigate how much the parakeets are competing for food (how much they're actually consuming in comparison to the native birds) and how the presence of the parakeets on the feeders affects the diversity and numbers of species using the garden feeders.

This experiment will complement a previous year long garden experiment that looked at the indirect effect of parakeet presence on feeding behaviour.

#### **What will this involve for you?**

- Letting us install a squirrel proof feeder in your garden. We would organise a time and day to do this that is convenient for you (and then again 6months later to install another feeder).
- Keeping the feeders topped up with peanuts and sunflower seeds for a year. We would be able to refund expenses up to £70 for the year for the bird food if you can provide receipts.
- Not using the other bird feeders in your garden for the whole year. You could carry on feeding niger seed for the finches if the feeder was placed well away from the experimental feeders. You could also continue to feed the ground feeding birds.
- Spending 20mins per week observing the numbers and species of bird on the feeders and emailing or posting this information to us on a regular basis (a few weeks of missed observations here and there through the year would not be a problem). This simply involves writing down how many birds you see and what species they are.
- Keeping a record of the amount of food consumed by the birds per week.
- A pack will be provided with information and data sheets for all observations and records.

#### **What is involved in the experiment?**

We will be using a squirrel proof feeder (for sunflower seed) on a stand. After 6 months we will swap it round to a parakeet proof feeder to see what difference it makes to the use of the feeders by the other birds once the parakeets are unable to access the food. For half the gardens the parakeet proof feeders will be used for the 1st 6months and then switched to the normal feeders and the other way round for the other half. This is in order to take the effect of the time of year in to account.

The data we collect from your garden will then be collated with data from 40 other gardens across London which also have regular parakeet visits. This will be analysed to see how much the parakeets are directly competing for food with the other birds on garden feeders and how this changes the use of the feeders by garden birds.

For information and questions contact Hannah at [parakeet@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:parakeet@imperial.ac.uk)  
You can also find out more about the project at [www.projectparakeet.co.uk](http://www.projectparakeet.co.uk)  
Kind regards,

Hannah Peck

### **Past Birds of Berkshire Reports for Sale**

A long term member has given me a set of Reports from 1968 to 1998 (less 1979) to sell on behalf of the Club. The ones for 68 to 73 are in the larger format with excellent covers. 1972 has an interesting cover which is noted "Manor Farm Autumn 1972" : Aquatic Warbler – August; Purple Heron – August; Corncrake – Sept; Bluethroat – Sept  
Bearded Tit – November; Snow Bunting – December.

The Reports are available from me at £4 each if collected at a meeting, extra if posted. If you would like one or more of these Reports please telephone, place an order and arrange collection.

John Roberts (0118 9482137)

### **And Finally – Note this Date Change**

Please note that the mid-week walk next June (to Padworth Common) will take place on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2012, and not the 15<sup>th</sup> as advertised in the Programme Card