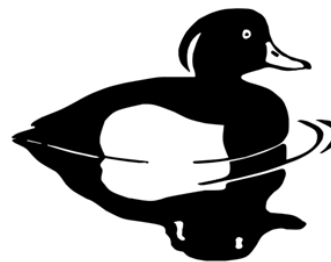


# BOC Newsletter

Summer 2012

No 58



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## Message from the Chairman

For me, summer moves to Autumn when the Swifts that scream around my house from May to July, pack up and go – this year a bit early on the 26<sup>th</sup> July. It's certainly been a mixed "Summer". When our programme of indoor meetings finished in April, we were deep in drought, then, just as many birds were hatching their young, the temperature crashed and the floods came. So not a brilliant breeding year for many species, though some early and late nesters may have fared better.

Although we do not hold indoor meetings during the summer, the Club has by no means been inactive. The programme of excursions continued culminating in the Bird Fair on 18<sup>th</sup> August, after which we move on to the 2012/13 programme that you will find with this Newsletter. You will also find the annual report for 2008, with Robert Gillmor's lovely cover painting of the two Red-footed Falcons at Woolhampton that year. The editorial team have been working hard to get up to date and we hope to publish the reports for 2009 and 2010 in about six months time.

On the conservation front it is good to see that Fobney Island nature reserve, on which the BOC has been working with the Reading Borough Council, the Environment Agency, Thames Water and the Thames River Conservation Trust, is now established and will be opened to the public in October. The flooding took its toll of the Little Ringed Plover that had occupied the island, but both Lapwing and Gadwall nested. Elsewhere, through the summer, John Lerpiniere, Ken Moore and other members have been advising landowners and organising working parties to promote bird conservation.

For everything that we do, from trips to conservation to producing reports and editing this Newsletter, the Club relies entirely on volunteers and we have a great team of people that do a great deal. But there is more to do - so please look at Mike Turton's note on the ways that you might help.

Now we look forward to the extensive programme of presentations that Ray Reedman has planned for the next year, starting on 26<sup>th</sup> September with Mike Read taking us to Corsica for the Spring migration. The excursions programme starts at Pagham on 8<sup>th</sup> September and includes trips to some great bird-watching sites around the UK and to Andalucia and the marshes and forests of north-east Poland.

**Welcome to the BOC's 2012/13 season!**

Renton Righelato

### **Editor's Note**

As always, the committee has worked hard to put together a varied programme of events for the new season, with indoor evening meetings featuring some top speakers on a variety of bird topics – surely something for everyone! Outdoor excursions will take us to many fine birdwatching sites, both near to home and further afield, and will include, if there is sufficient interest, a revival of our December mid-week walk and Christmas lunch (see later item and please contact Dot to register interest). The programme card contains information about both indoor meetings and outdoor trips so keep it handy through the year as a reminder.

All contributions to the newsletter are much appreciated – **please get items for the next edition of the newsletter to me by the end of October**. Many thanks go to all contributors to this newsletter. Illustrations courtesy of Kingfisher Publications plc.

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### **Annual General Meeting and Membership Renewal**

The AGM this year will be held on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> November and will be followed by an illustrated talk by Colin Wilson and Ted Rogers on Birding Catalonia - an account of a birding trip in 2011 featuring photos by Photographic Competition winner Brian Winter. A copy of the AGM agenda is enclosed with this newsletter.

There are three committee posts to be filled at this year's AGM: 2 for 3 years and one for 1 year. The committee are particularly looking for people who would be willing to take on key roles in running the Club; more details on what's involved in being on the committee and where we need help are on the back of the AGM agenda. If you would be willing to help, please contact me at [mike.turton@berksoc.org.uk](mailto:mike.turton@berksoc.org.uk) or on 0118 969 4197.

Also enclosed with this newsletter is your annual membership renewal form. It would be really helpful and save the Membership Secretary a lot of work if you could deal with your renewal promptly. Could you please make sure that you remember to complete the form and include it with your subscription; thanks to those of you did this last year as this helps the Membership Secretary to keep the Club's records up to date.

**If you pay by standing order and you think that there are any changes to your details which you may not have told us about, could you also please also complete and return the form**

Mike Turton - *Hon. Secretary*

### **Notification of Changes to Meetings**

The Club uses email wherever possible to send out urgent information, such as changes to meetings, to members as it is the cheapest and least labour-intensive option. However the Committee are aware that there are some members who are not on email and therefore may miss out on such information. If you are not on email and would like to receive notification of changes to meetings by phone, could you please phone Mike Turton on 0118 969 4197 to ask to be included on the list and to give your current phone number.

### **Christmas Lunch**

For a number of years the midweek walkers, often joined by partners or other club members, enjoyed a sociable Christmas lunch together after the walk. Last year for various reasons, such a lunch did not take place and disappointment was expressed by a number of people. There have been similar difficulties this year, most people being too busy or enjoying themselves in far flung places to take on this task.



So, provided there is sufficient interest and a suitable hostelry can be found, I have offered to try and arrange something suitable. At the time of writing (July) it is too early to get menus etc, but all will have to be settled, including deposits during October.

Sometime during September I will do the research but will need to give an estimate of numbers when I make the enquiries. The date will be December 13<sup>th</sup>. If you think you are genuinely interested in coming, please let me know a.s.a.p on 0118 9427563 or at the first club meeting. Expressed interest is not a commitment until the deposit is paid.

Dot Lincoln

### **Please Take Care when Parking**

There have been a few complaints recently about people parking carelessly at pull-ins at Hosehill Lake, Theale and Sandford Lane near Lavell's Lake resulting in the blocking of the access gateways used by anglers. While our members may not be the culprits, it worth reminding everybody to park sensibly and considerately at all times when out birdwatching. It is everyone's interest to have good relations between all users of these sites.



### **Birding Trips by Coach**

We have made a significant step forward in our trip planning this year by extending our cooperation with two local RSPB groups and BBOWT to plan visits to some of Britain's best reserves by coach. Pick-up points are chosen to make these trips available to as many as possible. In planning this way we hope to fill coaches; to provide a relief from the challenge of the long drives; to encourage more people to join in; and to reduce the number of car journeys. But we do need your support, because it is a costly and time-consuming process: These are all great days out, so book early wherever possible - and it is never too early for the organisers! The first point of contact for booking is the designated organiser, but I will be happy to field any queries from BOC members.



Ray Reedman

### **Coach Trip to the Ouse Washes - 15th January 2012**

There is nothing like a brisk January day in the Fens! The BOC coach was well-supported by East Berks and a good crowd arrived full of anticipation of some winter goodies - and were not disappointed! This is an enormous, long reserve with a lot of hides spread along the bank over a great distance, so the group split up to explore different areas. No one person could have covered the whole area and watched it well, so the resultant sightings were fragmented, but rich when gathered together. On our previous visit to nearby Welney the conditions had been bad, with the Washes one big lake. This time they were perfect, with plenty of pools and a lot of marshy land, but a fair bit of ice too.

A Merlin whizzed past soon after we arrived and was seen again later. Marsh Harriers, Buzzards and Kestrels were also seen. The duck flocks were enormous, dominated by Wigeon and Teal, but with plenty of my favourite Pintails. Geese, other than Greylags and Canadas, were hard to find, but small groups of Pink-feet, White-fronts and Beans were noted over a wide area by scattered groups. Whooper Swans were easy enough to find, but Bewick's were a bit more elusive, apparently more frequent at the Welney end. Waders were also numerous, with large flocks of Lapwings, Golden Plovers and Black-tailed Godwits, as well as Redshanks, Dunlin and Snipe scattered everywhere. A large mixed flock of Meadow Pipits and Linnets passed in front of the hides - but I could not turn any into Twite!

With few enough trees in the area it was interesting to see a couple of Green Woodpeckers and a Great Spotted Woodpecker, closer to the visitor centre, but a Kingfisher was less of a surprise. The feeders there attracted thirty Collared Doves and four Stock Doves at one sitting, but among the more common finches and Reed Buntings on the ground, we found a Tree Sparrow. Six were in the bushes outside.



It had been a wonderful day out: when we compared notes, we found that we had all seen a very good range of birds. But in a way, it was the organic whole of the site which was so satisfying.

Ray Reedman

### **Trip to RSPB Otmoor - 5th May 2012**

It was not the best of days for a bird watching trip. A fresh breeze from the northeast made it feel colder than the 6°C showing on the car's air temperature sensor, the sky was heavily overcast and it felt more like early March than early May. If that was not enough, the wettest April in a century had left fields flooded and had turned most paths into bogs. But, on the positive side, we were in one of the best reserves in the southeast and many migrant birds that had been delayed by the conditions had, in recent days, been sweeping across the country. Of special note were a flock of six white storks that had wandered over much of central southern England and had been in the Oxford area a few days previously. There were real possibilities of a spectacular day.

We met in the Otmoor Lane car park, where we donned extra sweaters, gloves and winter hats and considered whether to wear wellies or warm boots, and in my case, the warm boots won. By the appointed hour of 9am we numbers exactly one dozen hardy souls.

Continued.....

We made straight for the scrubby area beside the car park but, due to the conditions few warblers were singing so, with only common whitethroats to listen to we began walking along the long, straight bridleway to the west. Reed and sedge warblers were singing intermittently (it was too cold for their best efforts) and the wind kept them mostly in cover, but we soon managed reasonable views of both species plus distant views of an elusive wheatear and displaying buzzards. A crow was spotted mobbing a long tailed, sharp winged bird that looked like a raptor but on closer inspection was clearly a cuckoo. The vigorous pursuit continued for several hundred metres until the cuckoo hid in the reeds. What would a carrion crow have against a cuckoo? When we reached the new hide (2 years old, but it was my first visit since it opened) we soon learned that a greenshank and a garganey had been seen but that they were 'mobile'. It took us only a minute or so to find the greenshank about 200 metres away in the flooded fields and while locating it we found several wheatears considerably closer to us. We tried out the comfortable hide, where several people noted that there were pellets on a window ledge (outside) that could have been those of a kestrel or an owl. We saw nothing different from the hide, apart from 2 little egrets, and the garganey eluded us.



After leaving the hide, we scanned the marsh to the north, where there were breeding redshank and lapwing, before walking north towards the scrapes, pausing to watch at least 30 lapwings mobbing an intruding red kite. The mobbing was sustained and ferocious and the kite was almost forced to the ground before retreating without catching any of the many wader chicks that we assume were hiding among the tussocks of rough grass. We found a gratifyingly high number of reed buntings in and around the hedgerow as we made our way towards the first observation point (just a screen, not a proper hide) and as we approached it we spotted a wheatear on the fence, which was flushed before all of us had seen it by someone doing maintenance work. We advanced cautiously and relocated it on the rush screen of the viewing shelter where it was soon joined by a second then by three more in quick succession. We had fine views as all five fed, swooping down then returning to their

vantage point in a rather shrike-like manner, their prey seemed to be a swarm of St Mark's flies that was taking advantage of the shelter offered by the screens. Eventually we had to move forward so the wheatears, now joined by a whinchat, moved to a large oak tree nearby and continued to feed. I have to say that this was the first time I had seen wheatears perched in a tree; they usually perch low down.

We spent a few minutes viewing from the shelter but saw little more so we moved on to the second shelter, where the scrape, which usually holds some migrant waders at this season, was flooded forcing the waders elsewhere, but we did get a good and prolonged view of a hunting hobby. On the way back we got very close to a singing lesser whitethroat in the hedge, but as usual this skulker refused to reveal itself clearly. The wheatears were still around the first shelter and they had been joined by 3 whinchats, 1 nice male, a juvenile or moulting male and a female, and they too gave us close views. Further on, at a particularly thick and bramble-dominated part of the field boundary, a grasshopper warbler emitted a few brief bursts of song but we could not find it. However our search for the warbler was enlivened when a sharp eyed observer spotted a yellow wagtail in the dense sedges around a flooded area in the field and eventually we located three more including a bright yellow male.



By mid afternoon, when we got back to the car park, we had accumulated a list of almost 60 species, an excellent variety for an inland site. We had enjoyed a much better day than I had at first feared and the paths, well maintained by the RSPB, had not been at all muddy. Throughout the day a steady and sometimes prolific stream of swifts and swallows had passed overhead, we had found most UK warbler species (but garden warbler had not been located) and most of the common field and marsh birds had been accounted for. Regrettably, the stork flock was reported in Dorset that morning, but I think we were all more than content with what we did find.

Bill Nicoll