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## Introduction

My timescale for production of this latest newsletter has slipped a bit (as usual!), but at least my tardiness allows me to wish all members and their families a very happy Christmas and New Year – hopefully all your Christmas stockings are amply filled (including a copy of the excellent new Birds of Berkshire atlas I'm sure! And maybe even the new UK Bird Atlas, always assuming that you have a coffee table strong enough to take the weight!).



*Happy Christmas*

Winter has been quite slow getting going this year, with mild weather holding sway, despite the usual grim predictions of a very hard winter – maybe the New Year will bring a real change in the weather. Having said that, my usual winter garden bird visitors have been showing up recently, with a few redwings, siskins and the odd brambling, although not yet in the numbers of previous years. On a positive note we are seeing a lot more starlings of late, but even more noticeable is the now regular visits of parakeets – handsome birds undoubtedly, but, to my mind at least, not particularly welcome. They feed very delicately and show no obvious signs of aggression to other species but they certainly seem to boss the bird table when they arrive, as nothing else seems keen to feed while they are there.

Please note that the next newsletter will go out in February 2014, so can I ask that any relevant items get to me by end of January.

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As always many thanks go to all contributors to this newsletter. Illustrations courtesy of Kingfisher Publications plc.

## BTO Local Conference

We are holding another BTO Local (Berks/Oxon) Conference on Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2014 at Benson Village Hall (Oxfordshire). It will be an all-day event, including buffet lunch, for £15 per head. All are welcome - not just BTO members. There will be a number of speakers including Ian Newton and Mark Avery, together with a quiz, sales stalls etc. A full programme and booking form will be circulated nearer the time.

Ken and Sarah White  
Berkshire BTO Reps

## **BOC Photographic Competition 2014**

This popular evening will take place on 5th March 2014 at Room 109, Palmer Building and the highpoint will be the award of the Gordon Langsbury Memorial Trophy, won last year by Ken White's Cory's Shearwater in flight. In each of the last ten years we have found a new winner of the trophy but, as we know from the many individual category winners, it's often a close run thing! The judges will score each entry and their combined scores will enable them to choose category winners and runners-up for which there will be prizes. The Club Members will then vote on the three category winners to choose the winner of the Gordon Langsbury Memorial Trophy.

Next year's competition will be based on the same three categories as in 2013, Portrait, Action/behaviour and Flight. Members may submit up to 4 entries per category. The detailed rules are unchanged and are on the Club website at :- [http://berksoc.org.uk/photographic\\_competition/2013/photo\\_comp\\_2013\\_rules.shtml](http://berksoc.org.uk/photographic_competition/2013/photo_comp_2013_rules.shtml) and are unchanged.

We are delighted to announce that this year's competition will be judged by our own superb photographer and past winner, Dickie Duckett, and Dave Cottridge, a leading name in the field here in the UK. Dave is known to us from many superbly illustrated past talks, he is a winner of a British Bird Photographer of the Year Award and author or co-author of books including Rare Birds in Britain and Ireland – A Photographic Record, published in 1997 and Photographic Guide to the Shorebirds of the World published in 1995. See [www.cottridge.com](http://www.cottridge.com) for some of his artistic work.

The strict closing date for entries will be 21st February 2014 and they should be sent, preferably by email, to [colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk](mailto:colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk) or by CD to his home address – please contact him for details. The Club has a new data projector which we hope will enhance the projection of images on the night.

If you have any questions, please email Colin. We hope to see you at the competition on 5th March to cheer on your own entries!

## **Berkshire Birding Highlights of the Past 12 Months**

For those of you who weren't at the meeting on November 20<sup>th</sup>, the AGM had to be postponed due to insufficient attendance but these birding highlights were presented (with thanks to Ken Moore for their production). The AGM subsequently took place on the evening of the Social Evening, on December 11<sup>th</sup>.

**DECEMBER 2012** produced seemingly the most popular birds in County history - BUFF BELLIED PIPITS -The first arriving on the 13<sup>th</sup>, the second on The 26<sup>th</sup>-both at QMR. Both found by Mike McKee. They stayed on into January and we raised over £2,000 for club funds.

Also at QMR were a RED-THROATED DIVER, a GREAT NORTHERN DIVER, a first winter RED-NECKED GREBE and a LONG-TAILED DUCK. 13 RUFF at Borough Marsh together, brought back memories for some. The first WAXWINGS of a small irruption appeared, building up in January and February.

**JANUARY 2013** brought the third Diver species - a BLACK THROATED DIVER on the 13<sup>th</sup> again at QMR. QMR managed more Jan records with a fly through HEN HARRIER and a first winter ICELAND GULL. Approx 200 PINK FOOTED GEESE over Woodley on the 2<sup>nd</sup> January was a super record. However, perhaps the event of the year was at Moor Green a PALLAS'S WARBLER, the first for the County and a rare inland record.



**FEBRUARY's** main events were 2 WHOOPER SWANS & a single PINK FOOTED GOOSE in Mid Berks, and small groups of WHITE FRONTED GEESE in the East.

**MARCH.** Two drake GARGANEY, and much later in the month 4 MARSH HARRIERS were recorded. Up to 4 AVOCETS at different sites, and a STONE CURLEW on a landfill site in Colnbrook, OYSTERCATCHERS were back at their breeding sites too. Two counts of over 100 SNIPE in late March at Borough Marsh were rare sites these days.

**APRIL** produced another superb, a fabulous summer adult BONAPARTES GULL picked out by Chris Heard among the gulls at Theale. He went on that day to find a DOTTEREL on the Downs. A brief visit by another or the previous RED THROATED DIVER to QMR on the 27<sup>th</sup>. The first MONTAGU'S HARRIER of the year flew by Hampstead Norreys. Two OSPREYS were seen during the month, and there was a PIED FLYCATCHER at Dinton Pastures. And the PALLAS'S WARBLER was still at Moor Green, singing its heart out.

**MAY's** sightings at QMR included RED THROATED DIVER, Berkshire's first May record of this species, an adult LONG TAILED SKUA for a 17 minute visit on the 24<sup>th</sup>, only the 8<sup>th</sup> County Record, and two more ROSEATE TERNS, which seem to be turning into annual visitors.

**JUNE** confirmed that TURTLE DOVE really are having a hard time - only 3 sites recording arrivals. Whilst another ROSEATE TERN, again at QMR, being the highlight.

**JULY** - the long staying MARSH HARRIER at Moor Green Lakes stayed until at least the middle of the month. Four COMMON SCOTER were on Theale Main Pit briefly early in the month. WOOD SANDPIPERS at Slough SF and Moor Green marked the start of the autumn migration.



**AUGUST** – a noteworthy group of 27 Stone Curlew up on the Downs (followed up by 33 in September). A PECTORAL SANDPIPER, this time for only 3 days, again at Eton Wick. One of Berkshire's largest flocks of TURNSTONES, a total of 21, circled QMR three times, and flew off West. Whilst brief visits by a BONXIE on the 24<sup>th</sup>, and an adult SABINES GULL on the 27<sup>th</sup> completed QMR'S log.

**SEPTEMBER** looked to be getting into the swing of Autumn. A GREAT WHITE EGRET over LEA FARM, on the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup>, headed towards the N.E. corner, but kept going, never to be seen again. The first MERLIN of the autumn were seen at Moor Green and at Theale. And a CURLEW SANDPIPER at QMR topped the waders. Greenham Common had a good month with a RED BACKED SHRIKE on the 20<sup>th</sup>, only the seventh in the past 35 years or so, a WRYNECK and a BLACK REDSTART on the 29<sup>th</sup>. Incredibly another RED BACKED SHRIKE was seen in Colnbrook in East Berks, 2 days later.

**OCTOBER** started off with a YELLOW BROWED WARBLER on the 6<sup>th</sup> at Dinton Pastures; it or another was seen well on the 17<sup>th</sup>. A MEALY REDPOLL was caught & ringed at Padworth Common, a popular site for ringers and Redpoll, on the 19<sup>th</sup>. A GREAT WHITE EGRET flew over Lower Farm GP and at the end of the month a GREAT GREY SHRIKE visited Streatley Warren.

**NOVEMBER** has begun with two Shags at QMR on the 5<sup>th</sup> and another GREAT WHITE EGRET, this time at Heron Lake, Wraysbury on the 9<sup>th</sup>. Finally on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November a flock of 7 WHOOPER SWANS flew past Lea Farm.

## **The Birds of Buckinghamshire**

The Buckinghamshire Bird Club has announced a seasonal offer for the hardback book 'The Birds of Buckinghamshire', into which have been incorporated the records submitted for inclusion in the National BTO Bird Atlas. The local book includes mapping to tetrad level, of both winter and breeding seasons in addition to species comparison maps with the previous Bucks Atlas produced 20 years ago, showing the changes in the county's avifauna over that time. The Book was launched just over a year ago and has been a great success with its detailed individual species descriptions illustrated by photographs taken within Bucks by local photographers, plus a large section describing some of the best sites in the county to watch birds. As a Christmas offer this year the book is available at a special price of £12 to Buckinghamshire Bird Club members and £18 to non-members. To obtain a copy please e-mail John Gearing, who will either arrange local collection for you or send a copy by post to which a postage charge will apply. Further details are available at [www.bucksbirdclub.co.uk](http://www.bucksbirdclub.co.uk).

## **Outdoor Activities so far this Season...**

### **19th September: Titchfield Haven**

So often this is a great site in September, but this time it was a grey and windy day, which made for some discomfort and reduced both the action and the turnout: just a few hardy souls joined Carole White. The day's list was a mixture of the more common waders, ducks etc. We scanned the Solent several times in hopes of the odd wind-driven skua, but it was sometimes hard to stand up! There were a few Black-tailed Godwits, and a Greenshank among the Redshanks on the scrape, as well as plenty of Turnstones and Ringed Plovers on the beach as the tide fell. We might have hoped for more passage migrants but apart from Sand Martins we had just a few tantalising glimpses of common warbler species. One Cetti's Warbler shouted tantalisingly from the scrub, and the Bearded Tits were predictably hidden too, but we could hardly blame them, since we were only too grateful for the plentiful hides. Titchfield has done so much better for us on previous visits, but even so a day at the seaside is always pleasing – and we certainly had no cobwebs left by the time we had negotiated the sea-front at high tide!

### **6<sup>th</sup> October: Oare Marshes**

There is always something a bit special about this trip and Colin Wilson had ordered a perfect, shirt-sleeved autumn day, which deserved a far bigger turnout than the ten or so attending. The glassy Swale estuary reflected a few Great Crested Grebes; a Marsh Harrier could be seen over Sheppey; a number of Grey Seals rested on a shoal just off-shore; and a large flock of Brent Geese – the first of autumn - flew across from the mainland. Among the waders peppering the mud, a pair of Curlews performed a fascinating, but un-seasonal display routine. A sizeable flock of Redshanks huddled in a roost in the inlet.

However, the real spectacle of the day was enacted within the marsh... First a dozen or so Bearded Tits performed beautifully not twenty yards away. Behind them in the pools was a huge roost of mostly Black-tailed Godwits, Avocets, Lapwings and Golden Plovers. It took a bit of searching, but we did locate several Curlew Sandpipers among Dunlin, as well as a few Ruff, and a Yellow Wagtail too.

Ruth Angus was the first to find the Spotted Crake in the ditch near the hide and we all had wonderful views of it. An unseen raptor then distracted the waders and they in turn distracted us, with the spectacle of thousands of birds on the wing. They had settled again by the time we finished the circuit, but by now sandwiches called.



Colin had done his homework and was anxious to get us over to Cliffe Pools next. It took a while to locate the pool which had been frequented regularly by a Lesser Yellowlegs. With reports on its supposed whereabouts from some very twitchy twitchers (who then dashed off to another pool) we decided to dig in and wait where we were. It took an hour and a half for the bird to return, and to join two Green Sandpipers, several Ruffs, and a Greenshank. With such comparisons, this was the perfect way to see a species which was a “first” for several of those who had lasted the course. As we left, the twitchers returned, still frustrated. They were a friendly bunch, so it was very hard to tell them that the bird had just flown out again!

For us at least, this had been a particularly successful day: both quantity and quality in the best possible weather.

### **17<sup>th</sup> October: Moor Green**

A dozen people joined me on a dry and mild morning. The site was quiet in the extreme: gone were the summer migrants and it was still not cold enough to push in the winter birds. There was just a scattering of the more routine wildfowl and grebes on the lakes – a pair of Egyptian Geese being the most interesting - and very little viewable in the bushes. We spent some time at the viewpoint on the new workings, from which we found a Green Sandpiper, Stonechats and Meadow Pipits, but there was no glimpse of the Jack Snipe which had been reported earlier that week. Some managed a glimpse of a Common Snipe as a consolation prize. The “usual tree” was not wearing its Little Owl, but a passing Sparrowhawk and the odd Kestrel gave some relief. The local flock of Barnacle Geese flew in with two hybrids among them.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> November. Farlington Marshes**

I stood in for Bill who was poorly, but the task of “leading” the four others who had defied a poor forecast was hardly onerous. A damp start soon gave way to a bright and very windy morning. When we first arrived there was still plenty of mud showing in Langstone Harbour, with a number of species dotted about in the gullies. Among them was the only Bar-tailed Godwit of the day. As the tide rose, the many waders gathered to roost. Some of these were in the main pool, but mostly hidden from view as they sheltered, though a number of Teal, a few Shovelers and some Pintails were more visible. A trio of very late Sandwich Terns flew through the area, arguably the most unexpected sighting of the day.

The tide rose fast and soon most of the waders were on the offshore islands - a good variety of species, all seen in excellent light. But the lasting impressions were of spectacular swirling flocks of Dunlin, Knot and Grey Plovers, mercurial in the wonderful light, and of a flock of about 120 Oystercatchers, which flew low and fast a foot above the water. One cause of the agitation was a Peregrine, which we later saw out on an RSPB island to the east. Just before we spotted him, a female Merlin passed close to inside the sea-wall – and that was worth the visit on its own!

A Kestrel hovered over the interior marsh, ignored by the grazing Wigeon, Brent Geese and Canada Geese. Among these were plenty of Curlews, Black-tailed Godwits and Lapwings, as well as a number of Little Egrets and one Heron.

Out on the tideway we found Great Crested Grebes, a couple of dozen Shelduck, and a small flock of Red-breasted Mergansers. On the fringes of the sea-wall, we noted Reed Buntings, Meadow Pipits, Rock Pipits, a male Stonechat, and a couple of Linnets.

We had just completed the full circuit when a new wet front came up quite fast. A downpour fortunately coincided with the shelter of the one building on the site. In the lull which followed we searched more in hope than in expectation for Bearded Tits, but none showed. A new downpour as we returned to the cars convinced us that this was a good time to bring an unexpectedly good day to a conclusion.

### **21<sup>st</sup> November. Queen Mother Reservoir**

Despite a biting NE wind and threatening skies, four hardy members, led by Renton Righelato, did the circuit of QMR. There were not a lot of birds on the reservoir, but a juvenile Shag was nice to see in Berkshire, and a Water Pipit provided excellent views. According to Renton, it was worth the walk, so I now wish I had made the effort!

### **Coming up...**

16<sup>th</sup> January: Hurley (Nr Maidenhead): Walk by the Thames

19<sup>th</sup> January: Coach Trip to Ouse Washes RSPB. Ticket £19. Places limited. **BOOKING ESSENTIAL**

2<sup>nd</sup> February: Coach Trip to Minsmere with East Berks RSPB **BOOKING ESSENTIAL**

6<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> February: Weekend in Suffolk and Norfolk: **BOOKING ESSENTIAL**

**See card or website for details.** And there is a lot more to come after that. Please remember that your support is essential. If transport is needed, please contact trip leaders.

Ray Reedman

## **Message from the Treasurer**

I have now been treasurer of BOC for a year and, as a result, my respect for John Robert, the previous treasurer, has increased considerably. It is much more work than I expected and I am amazed that John managed to do it for 17 years without the benefit of a computer spreadsheet. I have learned about gift aid, which provides nearly 20% of our income, and discovered that 10% of the membership gives rise to 90% of the work. My thanks to the other 90% (and you probably know if you are one of them) for making my life a bit easier and saving the club some money. So I hope that the advice given below, most of which seems fairly obvious to me, will be noted and followed by all of you. I don't want to nag, so I have included some explanation so you know why it matters.

- Please keep us up to date with your personal information, e.g. postal address, telephone, etc. I need this mainly for the gift aid claim, and the Inland Revenue do check it against their tax database and reject claims with inconsistencies.
- Please send in a gift aid form regularly. We get nearly 20% of our income from reclaimed tax, so it matters. If you can't remember sending one in, then it's time to send another. There is a form with the annual information pack sent to all members in August (and another here below). Some of you have not renewed your old mandates that were replaced by gift aid forms in the 1990s! They are still legal, but are they still accurate, I wonder? These claims are 'enduring', i.e. they are valid until you cancel them, so if you cease to pay tax, please tell me so I can delete your name from my list of claimants. And finally, gift aid mandates need to be in the name of the person paying the subscription (if that person is not the member).
- Please pay your subscription promptly, ideally by standing order (we can't do direct debits, the bank does not allow it for small clubs). A lot of my time, and the membership secretary's, is spent chasing late payers. Also it costs us quite a lot in postage despite the increasing use of email. And let us know if you do not wish to rejoin – a quick email is all we need. If you want to pay your membership by cheque you can post it to Iain Oldcorn (Membership Secretary). Or you can pay by cash or cheque at most indoor meetings by giving it to Iain or me or Carole White. I attend as many indoor meetings as I can, and at least one of these other people is generally there.
- Remember we are a charity and that we try to raise as much money as possible for conservation projects. If you can pay a pound or two extra or forego your discount (for standing order payers and retired members) all of that goes into the conservation fund. A significant proportion of members do pay a little bit extra but I would like to see more of you doing it.

Honorary Treasurer – Bill Nicoll

## **Gift Aid Declaration Form**

<b>GIFT AID DECLARATION</b>	
The Club's membership subscription and other donations are within the Gift Aid guidelines, so if you pay Income Tax or Capital Gains Tax and complete the following section, the Club can recover tax on the donation made.	
To: Berkshire Ornithological Club	Date:
All donations I make from this date until further notice shall be Gift Aid donations. I want the Berkshire Ornithological Club to reclaim tax on my donations.	
Signed :	
Title:	
Full name *:	
Address:	
Post Code :	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your name as known to HM Revenue &amp; Customs</li></ul>	
Remember to notify the Club if you no longer pay an amount of income tax or capital gains	