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## **Introduction**

Welcome to the “festive” edition of the newsletter, which comes with season’s greetings to all members and their families. Once again winter seems reluctant to get going this year (I seem to remember saying something pretty similar at this time last year!). Certainly the real winter birds have been in relatively short supply so far, although I’m pleased to report that my garden birds have included the odd brambling, siskin and redpoll fighting it out with the parakeets, and losing!

I look forward to seeing you at Club events in the New Year – there are some excellent indoor talks coming up in the next few months, along with the popular Photographic Competition evening in February (see item below). **Please note that the meeting which includes the talk about “The Birds of Kuwait” will take place on January 21<sup>st</sup> (not the 14<sup>th</sup> as advertised in the programme)**

Please note that the next newsletter will go out in February 2015, so can I ask that any relevant items get to me by early February.

Ted Rogers (01344 883237)  
8, Ranelagh Crescent  
Ascot  
SL5 8LW  
Email: ted.rogers@berksoc.org.uk



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

## **BOC Photographic Competition 2015**

The ever popular Photographic Evening will take place on Wednesday 4th March 2015 in Room 109, Palmer Building at Reading University. This hotly contested competition results in the award of the much-prized Gordon Langsbury Memorial Trophy and, with most years providing a new winner, everyone is in with a chance! As last year, 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 overall winner. A list of previous pictures and winners can be found on Club web site at [http://www.berksoc.org.uk/photographic\\_competition/index.shtml](http://www.berksoc.org.uk/photographic_competition/index.shtml)

Next year's competition will be based on the same three categories as in 2014, Portrait, Action/behaviour and Flight. Members may submit up to 4 entries per category. The detailed rules can be found at [http://berksoc.org.uk/photographic\\_competition/2014/photo\\_comp\\_2014\\_rules.shtml](http://berksoc.org.uk/photographic_competition/2014/photo_comp_2014_rules.shtml) and are unchanged for 2015.

The strict closing date for entries will be 18<sup>th</sup> February 2015 and your pictures should be sent, preferably by email, to [colin.r.wilson@btinternet.com](mailto:colin.r.wilson@btinternet.com) or on a CD to his home address (please contact him for details). If you have any questions, please email Colin.

Looking forward to seeing you at the competition, as competition entrant, interested spectator, or both!

## **Berkshire Rarities Committee (BRC) Review**

The BOC, together with the NDOC and the County Recorder, is carrying out the quinquennial review of recording and record adjudication. The review panel is seeking input from interested parties, both submitters and users of records, on if and how we should improve the process.

**Please send your comments to the chair of the panel, Tim Ball [tim.ball@rbringing.co.uk] by 31st January 2015.**

Note 1: Records are submitted by a variety of routes and compiled in the county database, which is the core resource for preparing reports, advising on conservation issues and returning data to regional and national bodies like the BTO, RSPB, TVERC. The Berkshire Records Committee, chaired by the Recorder, is charged with maintaining the scientific integrity of the records.

Note 2: The review panel comprises the following members : Tim Ball (chair), Fraser Cottington, Renton Righelato, John Swallow, Marek Walford plus Chris Heard (Recorder and BRC chair) and Ken Moore (BRC).

## **Committee Update**

The Committee met on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2014 and discussed the following:

- The 2013/14 accounts and the budget for 2014/15.
- Membership Secretary's report.
- Initial arrangements for the 2014/15 season of indoor meetings, whether to have the first meeting at the end of September or at the beginning of October, falling attendance at indoor meetings and the ever-increasing costs of hiring Room 109.
- Conservation report. Progress on a number of projects with which the Club is involved, particularly at Padworth Lane and Woolhampton.
- Report from the Birds of Berkshire Editorial Board on progress on the 2011 report.
- The redevelopment of the BOC website, including the specification and the quotation for the work.
- Arrangements for the quinquennial review of the County Recorder and the Berkshire Records Committee.
- An update on candidates for elections at the forthcoming AGM and the continuing need for volunteers to look after publicity and edit the annual report.
- Feedback on events at which the BOC was represented.
- Social media. A report on activity on the Club's Facebook group and on Twitter.

At the AGM on 19<sup>th</sup> November, Bill Nicoll was re-elected as Treasurer, Sally Wearing was elected as Secretary and Becky Thomas and Richard Stansfield were elected to the Committee.

Mike Turton

## **Birding Highlights of the last 12 months, courtesy of Ken Moore**

**December 2013** was a quiet month for birds. An immature Iceland Gull at QMR and a single WAXWING in the Vicar of Brays's garden - the only record for the last 12 months. And we had a very soggy end to 2013, a year that saw the Berkshire list increase by two splendid species: Pallas's Warbler and Bonapartes Gull. What would 2014 bring?

**January 2014**, in the soggy beginning of the New Year the flooded meadows between Theale and Reading held a record numbers of Little Egret – 27 counted on the 19<sup>th</sup> near Burghfield Bridge. A single BLACK-NECKED GREBE was present for a day at THEALE MAIN PIT on the 7th. Ringtail HEN HARRIERS were seen near BURY DOWN and at JEALOTTS HILL. An adult RING-BILLED GULL at QMR on the 20th was the best gull of the month, followed by two LITTLE GULLS and four KITTIWAKES around the county. A good roost count of 320 to 400 PIED WAGTAILS in CENTRAL READING was a regular feature during the month. At SOUTH HILL PARK on the 8th January, a WATER RAIL was seen to grab a drinking GOLDFINCH, quickly drown it and then start to peck and pull at it. And one lucky observer had two calling WHOOPER SWANS flying over whilst waiting at a bus stop in WINKFIELD.

At last, some better weather in **February**. The first OYSTERCATCHERS of the year arrived at THEALE MAIN PIT on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 5 RINGED PLOVERS flew into the old Aggregate area at LOWER FARM. Two were metal ringed, one being a colour ringed bird from a Hampshire Coastal project. A drake SCAUP was seen at MOOR GREEN LAKES, staying only a few days from the 20th. On the 27th, at PADWORTH LANE, a GREAT WHITE EGRET was seen flying over. During January and February, one lucky observer had up to 63 LESSER REDPOLLS in her BRACKNELL garden, plus regular visits of a MEALY REDPOLL.



**March** brought the first LITTLE RINGED PLOVER of the year on the 16th at PADWORTH LANE FLOODS, an average date of arrival. Another drake SCAUP arrived at LOWER FARM on the 19th for a few days and 2 RED-BREASTED MERGANSERS briefly visited QMR on the 24th. There were 94 BRAMBLING in SWINLEY Forest on the 23rd March and a mobile flock of 45 CROSSBILLS there on the 27th. The first SANDWICH TERN arrived on the 25th March at QMR, interestingly the same date as the two previous years. At least 8 MEALY REDPOLL at ASCOT HEATH, of which 7 had been ringed, was the month's count. On the 26<sup>th</sup> again at QMR, a BLACK REDSTART.

In **April** there was a succession of MARSH HARRIERS, a total of 6 individuals, mostly at QMR. A single BLACK-TAILED GODWIT was at HORTON GP on 15<sup>th</sup> with a small group of LAPWING. Two BAR-TAILED GODWITS visited DINTON PASTURES and QMR on the 21st, and at EVERSLEY a group of 28 flew over the NEW WORKINGS into Hampshire. There were remarkable numbers of WHITE WAGTAILS during April, at least 50 birds at 8 different sites. Three GARGANEY appeared towards the end of the month - a pair at BURNTHOUSE LANE and a single drake at QMR.



A dozen WHIMBREL flew through QMR; 8 GREENSHANK visited BURNTHOUSE LANE. A single BLACK TERN at BLACK SWAN LAKE, DINTON PASTURES was the only spring record of this species. A single TURTLE DOVE seen at FOLIEJON PARK on the 29<sup>th</sup> was the first of the few seen this year. Only 5 Grasshopper Warblers were recorded during the month, hopefully under-recorded. And a candidate for BIRD OF THE YEAR arrived near to SPENCERS WOOD on the 24<sup>th</sup> - a WHITE STORK - which stayed that day and re-appeared a week later for a longer stay.

**May** is one of the best bird-watching months of the year and May 2014 did not disappoint. Two brief visits both on the 6th, a SPOONBILL over COCKMARSH and a female RED-FOOTED FALCON over SUMMERLEAZE GRAVEL PIT. A GREY PLOVER was at LEA FARM on the 10th, two AVOCETS visited QMR on the 14<sup>th</sup> and a WOOD SANDPIPER at MOOR GREEN LAKES. SANDERLING remained regular visitors to QMR, but they also visited the floods on the DOWNS on the Berkshire/Oxfordshire border, along with other waders and gulls. A summer-plumaged SPOTTED REDSHANK arrived at BURNTHOUSE LANE on the 16<sup>th</sup>. QMR had a brief KITTIWAKE on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 3 more the next day. The SECOND BIRD OF THE YEAR was at GREEN PARK, READING on the 22nd May - a GREAT REED WARBLER - only a one day bird, but how superb it was. A total of 14 HOBBIES over HORTON GP on the 31st May was the highest count this year. And another single TURTLE DOVE, this time a garden in WINNERSH.

**June** was a quieter month. QMR had a good run though - 3 adult KITTIWAKE on the 6<sup>th</sup>, a single SANDWICH TERN on the 8th and a drake COMMON SCOTER on the 14th. A farmer at ENBORNE photographed a WHITE STORK during the month. A good month for TURTLE DOVE these days, with 3 separate sightings, one of which stayed at PADWORTH LANE for nearly a week. *Turtle Dove is now a rare bird and if anyone has been lucky enough to see evidence of breeding, please send in the record. Turtle Dove along with Lesser Spotted Woodpecker are now on the national Rare Birds Breeding Panel's reporting list.*

**July** mustered a BLACK-NECKED GREBE at QMR, a group of 5 GARGANEY at ETON WICK, a drake COMMON SCOTER at MOATLANDS GP at Theale, and a SPOTTED CRAKE was found and photographed with a WATER RAIL at SLOUGH SEWAGE FARM. 8 BLACK-TAILED GODWITS were recorded at 3 sites, a WOOD SANDPIPER at Slough Sewage Farm and TURNSTONE at QMR. At QMR there was an amazing count of at least 28 COMMON SANDPIPER.



**August** began with 7 COMMON SCOTER at QMR during early morning of the 6th, whilst the Downs had the first reported QUAIL of the year the following day. 4 BLACK TERNS were at THEALE MAIN on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 4 more at QMR on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Another BLACK NECKED GREBE, this time at THEALE MAIN on the 17<sup>th</sup>. A LITTLE STINT arrived at ETON WICK for a four day stay. On the 25th August, 2 dark morph ARCTIC SKUAS spent the early morning at QMR. Two HONEY BUZZARDS were seen, one on 29th near WINTER HILL and another on 31<sup>st</sup> over ETON WICK. Two MARSH HARRIERS were seen, one over BURY DOWN, the other over the NEW WORKINGS at MOORGREEN LAKES, and three Ospreys.

**September** had three more OSPREYS and 2 more MARSH HARRIERS. A SANDERLING flew around the NEW WORKINGS, MOORGREEN on the 14th, a LITTLE STINT was at QMR and a CURLEW SANDPIPER and 2 Ruff at ETON WICK. A WRYNECK was at QMR on the 14th and another at GREAT SHEFFORD was trapped and ringed on the same day. The 17th September saw the first report of the GREAT WHITE EGRET at LOWER FARM, which was still present in mid-November. On the 21st a juvenile SABINE'S GULL spent 30 minutes at QMR another great bird for Berkshire. An immature GARGANEY was at HOSEHILL for a week, whilst 9 juvenile COMMON SCOTER were at QMR on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. The 18th September saw a juvenile CUCKOO fly through CROOKHAM COMMON. It was a good autumn for WHINCHAT with groups of six or seven being reported in different places.

**October** QMR seemed the place to be this year, rather than the Isles of Scilly (where many of the Berkshire Birders were).



QMR had PURPLE SANDPIPER, GREY PHALAROPE, 2 BONXIES and LITTLE STINT, supported by RUFF, SANDERLING, KITTIWAKE and a dark-bellied BRENT GOOSE. The first GREAT NORTHERN DIVER of the second winter period arrived at THEALE MAIN. A GREAT GREY SHRIKE on the Downs from the 28th looks to be wintering there, a photogenic MARSH HARRIER was at LOWER FARM. Two YELLOW-BROWED WARBLERS were found: 1 at HUNGERFORD, trapped, ringed and photographed and another at WHITEKNIGHTS PARK, seen well by many. Perhaps the best bird was a LESSER SCAUP drake at WRAYSBURY from the 29th.

And so we move on to **November**. We returned to a soggy weather pattern, but none the less some interesting birds. The GREAT WHITE EGRET and GREAT GREY SHRIKE were still to be seen, another GREAT NORTHERN DIVER arrived at THEALE MAIN on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and is still there and another was seen, briefly at QMR. 6 MERLINS have been claimed so far this month, another headache for the BRC. A SHORT-EARED OWL flew over LEA FARM on the 9<sup>th</sup> and one of the more spectacular sights was the flock of 920 GOLDEN PLOVER at REMENHAM HILL on the 7th.

### **BOC Weekend on the Isle of Portland – April 2014**

This weekend reminded me of the usual comment on my boyhood school report card – “could do better”. I say this because we did have a pretty good weekend by most standards, but we were let down by the conditions, both the weather and the migration pattern.

It is quite a long way to Weymouth so we began the weekend in the New Forest at Acres Down, which is literally 5 minutes off the route, in order to give the drivers a break and get in some woodland bird watching. However when we got there it was raining, but nevertheless less we set off into the forest in the hope of a finding few birds and maybe seeing some improvement in the weather but we were sadly disappointed in both respects. We got soaked and found hardly a living creature as we splashed through the silent forest, trying to avoid the worst of the mud and puddles.

The weather forecast had indicated that it would be better in the west so we returned to the cars and went on to Lodmoor RSPB reserve on the edge of Weymouth and, as predicted, it stopped raining just east of Weymouth. We then had a very pleasant walk round the reserve. The sun came out and dried out our wet clothes and we had some good views of several bird species. A pair of marsh harriers were active; one a very well marked female with the most developed golden shoulder patches that I have ever seen, and her partner, an unusual brown morph male, which we thought was another female at first. Sedge and reed warblers were singing, though in smaller numbers than I expected, and we had close views of a sedge warbler but the reed warblers were very reluctant to show. A pair of bearded tits came right out into the open within 20 yards of us and kept us amused for several minutes. A few lesser whitethroats were singing and were not too hard to see for what can often be a very skulking species. Cetti's warblers were the commonest of the warblers and as ever they were hard to see but with so many making so much noise we did eventually see several. Waders were a bit of a disappointment as was the case for the whole weekend. Excluding a few little egrets and grey herons (which I don't usually class as waders) there was a total of 6 wading birds on the reserve, where in the past I have usually seen reasonable numbers of various species. We found 2 oystercatchers, one ringed plover, one common sandpiper and (a bit of a bonus) two whimbrel that gave us good close views. In fact the visit to Lodmoor established something of a precedent, with waders and passerines scarce, and terns absent where they might have been expected in numbers. Or, as several locals put it, “It's been a funny year”. Many migrants came through early but recently there had been hardly any, a disappointment, as this was the main attraction of Portland in late April. Later in the day we tried our luck on Verne Common (the high part of the island) but it was birdless. In the late afternoon we checked in to Portland Lodge, a basic but adequate hotel with the great virtue of being less than 10 minutes drive from The Bill.

We began Saturday with an early sea-watch, enduring blustery showers and salt spray until the cold and prospect of breakfast in the nearby “Lobster Pot” cafe brought us to our senses. Our time on The Bill was not wasted, however. There was a steady stream of passing gannets, shags and auks to keep us interested and occasional bonus birds such as 3 red throated divers (I had a useful lesson on flight identification of divers from a friendly local birder), a dozen or so Manx shearwaters, some quite close in and, best of all, a great skua passed no more than 100 yards out, close enough to see all the details.



After breakfast we walked through the fields and bushes behind the headland and found 3 wheatears and the same number of whinchats but there was a conspicuous lack of small birds – not a single whitethroat, willow warbler or chiffchaff was singing never mind the hoped for ring ouzel or redstart. Our only rewards were several swallows, a couple of stonechats, a few meadow pipits and a rock pipit. We moved north in search of better luck but at Ferrybridge there were only three waders (yes, THREE! one whimbrel, one black tailed godwit and one ringed plover) and no terns at all! I have never seen so little there.

Our final visit of the days was to Radipole RSPB reserve in central Weymouth. We had a walk round and spent time at the only remaining hide but saw nothing out of the ordinary except that some of us got a good view of the long-staying hooded merganser and though it may be of doubtful origin but is nonetheless a very smart bird, which in itself made the visit worthwhile.

In some ways the meals were almost the best bit of this weekend. The breakfasts in the Lobster Pot were first class and very welcome after a spell on the sea lashed extreme of Dorset. The Cove House Inn in Fortuneswell, where we ate in the evening, is a dramatically positioned pub overlooking Chesil beach, with a nice atmosphere, a fairly sheltered patio, good beer and quite good homemade pub food.

On the final day, Sunday, we began again at 6:15am on Portland Bill and saw more or less the same species as the previous day. Once again there were very few migrant passerines, a group of 5 wheatears in a field seemed to be about the only overnight arrivals. While searching for the regular little owl in the observatory quarry we learned in conversation with someone from the observatory that it had been the same all week with very few birds being netted in the observatory garden. We soon found the owl which was very obliging and was still in view when we passed again an hour later. The high point of the morning (possibly excluding breakfast) was when two bonxies settled on the sea close to shore and proceeded to beat up the local herring gulls. This lasted for several minutes and it was the best and most prolonged view of this difficult species that I have had for many years.

All things considered it was a good, but not a classic, weekend. I clearly remember one day on The Bill when migrants came in thick and fast, a hoopoe flew in off the sea and an exhausted black redstart dropped onto the sea only yards from shore only to struggle off again and make it to the rocks and survival. But unfortunately these 'special' days are the exception. We had a total (including the dubious merganser) of 86 species over the weekend including several scarce or hard to see birds. However, the wash out in the New Forest and the conspicuous lack of passage migrants means that I have to score the weekend 'below average' but I will try again another year knowing that you can't expect a classic fall of migrants on every visit to Portland.

### **BOC Trip to Warsash - September 2014**

For the last few years we have done a mid week walk 'further away', usually to Titchfield Haven but this year, for a change, we went a few miles northwest to Hook-with-Warsash. This is a nice reserve with good facilities (at Warsash harbour) and a nice mix of habitats including muddy shore, shingle spit, coastal scrub, fresh pools, farmland and woodland. We met at 10am, the usual time for mid week walks, on what turned out to be a very balmy day with light winds but not much sunshine. There were eleven of us though two had to leave early (and missed some good birds). We started by heading to the north of the harbour, walking about a quarter mile across Bunny Meadow. I have no idea why the area is so-named; it is all mud flat with not a rabbit in sight; maybe there were once meadows behind a long gone sea wall. This area is best when the tide is out, which it was at this time, so we found a reasonable selection of shore birds including three greenshanks and a most confiding kingfisher that was clearly very accustomed to meeting people.



Next we went south of the harbour to view the fresh pools and scrub where, during my reconnaissance the week before, I had enjoyed a close fly-by view of an osprey, not to be repeated this time, unfortunately. There were many species of ducks and a few waders on the pool but the only slightly notable birds were a small group of eclipsed pintails. We had more luck in and around the scrubby areas with good views of wheatears, a whinchat, a lesser whitethroat and, for the lucky few, a brief view of a Dartford warbler.

We moved on to the farmland, looking for yellow wagtails, which were around (somewhere) or the resident little owl, but most people did get a decent look at a female redstart in a hedgerow. We finished at about 4pm having covered a circular route of 3 to 4 miles. It was not a classic day's birding but we saw a few less common species and I, for one, enjoyed the outing.

Bill Nicoll

## Birding Crossword No. 1

1	2	3			4	5	6	7
8					9			
10								
	11		12	13				14
15								
		16						
17					18			
	19				20			
21						22		

Across :-

1. Duck – to a greater or lesser extent.
4. Dice disintegrated - now frozen over.
8. The Kestrel does both to get an insect.
10. Source of metal contains mixed oil – it's golden!
11. The very edges confuse Ingrams.
15. It takes this long for a bird to evolve.
17. N. American *Podiceps nigricollis*.
18. Mixed lift to fly here and there.
19. An endangered goose - on a Fenland river?
20. The page turns to open wide.
21. Front to back of nautical reverse for a Latin seabird.
22. Swan is, or is in, an enclosure.

Down :-

1. Ducks as navvies?
2. The angler's "friend" is great in N. America!
3. All about birds.
5. Duck sounds like a lengthy story in English, but is noisy in Latin.
6. Supercilium is *above*. Not this one.
7. An old corvid sounds on the way out...
9. Make like an "injured" Plover.
12. ... but a large corvid sounds a little mad.
13. I wish it would warble in mine!
14. The best way to record more than nine songsters?
16. Birds reconnoitre easily in here.

With thanks to Ray Reedman for his challenging puzzle.

(Editor's Note: Just in case anyone blames me!)

Enjoy! See next Newsletter for the solution.